CONNECTED FOR THE COMMISSION: HYBRID WORSHIP WITH A MISSIONAL PURPOSE

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ABSTRACT

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The context is Restoration Bible Church International in Brandywine, Maryland. The problem is that the COVID-19 pandemic reshaped evangelism and the ministry needs to be technically and functionally equipped to be effective in reaching the community. If participants are trained in a hybrid model of worship, then the Church can fulfill the Great Commission and win the lost virtually. Research methodology is qualitative; involving interviews, questionnaires, and case studies. The project seeks to increase ministry engagement through a hybrid worship model that will fulfill the churches evangelism mandate.

. A mixed-methods approach involving interviews, questionnaires, and case studies as employed. Findings highlight those digital tools foster accessibility, and challenge theological engagement, and community building. This study emphasizes the importance

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As I consider my journey for the last three years in the halls of the United Theological Seminary, I can honestly say that I have been challenged to develop in my studies. A plethora of people have been instrumental throughout my process.

Firstly, I want to thank the faculty and staff for helping me get through this program. I want to give a special thanks to my mentors, Goodman, Pointer, and Brown. They did not give up on me during my time of illness, but they prayed for me and helped me through a very tough period of my life. They are the MVP in my book.

Next, I want to thank my church family the Restoration Bible Church International of Maryland. Your participation in my program and project was very instrumental to my completion. I want to thank my classmates we started as students but now we are family for life. I love all of you, and I thank God for you all.

Lastly, thank my children and wife for your support during these three years. A lot has happened and transpired, but God has been faithful.

DEDICATION

To God be the glory for the things he has done. Without God, none of this would be possible! His steadfast love is unfailing! I would like to shed light on my friends and family. Thank you for your prayers during this time. Your encouragement pushed me at times when I thought I would give up. To my community of faith, the Restoration Bible Church International, I give God the glory for your participation and assistance in getting me through my project. Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedules. Lastly, I want to say to my late parents Brother Francis A. Lewis, Sr., and Edna Lewis thank you for instilling discipline and believing in me. Your strength is forever with me. I love you!

INTRODUCTION

The advent of the internet has changed the way things run around the globe. Communication and connections have been redefined, and this goes to religion as well. Religious communities engage with each other and fulfill their spiritual missions online. Christianity, which for many years had been building on traditions of community gatherings, fellowship, and congregants' relationships, now faces opportunities and challenges in adapting to this digital age. Online church communities have gained popularity, and most Christians worldwide are slowly integrating into online church services other than attending physical church communities. Churches and other religious groups value their physical churches. They are seen as holy places where the presence of God is felt. Certain rituals and ceremonies can only be carried out in these physical buildings. In the Bible, God asked Solomon to build the temple, and it has been relocated by generations repeatedly. People go for their prayers and commit their offerings and sacrifices to God.

However, the growth of the internet church community is left with questions regarding the effectiveness of online worship. The hybrid model of worship, where some members can attend church physically and others join online, has provided a certain level of flexibility to participate in services in person or virtually. This model has grown. It saw its major growth during the COVID-19 pandemic era. With the strict measures that were put in place, such as social distancing and the withdrawal of social gatherings, it

was difficult for Christians and other religious groups to fellowship together in person. Churches then took the initiative to adopt online and social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok to stream church services and to share Christian messages.

Throughout this Doctor of Ministry (DMin) program, I have been able to engage in research that explores the changes in worship, community building, and missiology practices. Previous research papers discuss various forms of evangelism and how they have changed and evolved. Chapter Two discusses the Great Commission as discussed in the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus instructed the disciples after his resurrection that they should spread his teachings to all the nations of the world. The Great Commission is considered a foundational mandate for Christian evangelism and mission work. It discusses the responsibility of believers to share the gospel, teach others about Jesus, and baptize them, spreading the Christian faith across different cultures and religions. Besides the Great Commission, the chapter explores various biblical figures who carried out evangelism and missiology, especially in the New Testament.

In Chapter Three, the Historical Foundations explores the history of the Internet and how, over time, it has created instantaneous connections, including communications. Social media has impacted the rise of hybrid worship services, and various religious institutions are giving online worship service opportunities to their members and congregants. The chapter traces back to the evolution of worship and until the emergence of online worship.

Chapter Four discusses the Theological Foundations, specifically focusing on the theological theme of missiology. The chapter relates modern forms of evangelism and

missiology to the Great Commission, as discussed in the Gospel of Matthew. The chapter establishes how the Internet has played a transformational role in evangelism, especially for the present generation.

The Interdisciplinary Chapter (Five) explores the impact of the Internet on many levels of the Christian community. The research goal was to establish a link between communication and theology by showing the role the Internet plays as a form of theological expression and transformation within religious contexts. The positives and negatives of the Internet are explored to view the opportunities and challenges presented. As part of the research, ethical implications are discussed, especially those that emerge between theology and digital communication.

The final chapter is on the project analysis, which discusses the information gained throughout my project. I integrated my findings from foundational research on the Bible, theology, and interdisciplinary studies, with particular attention paid to the Great Commission's modern applications. I discussed how digital tools can be used to increase the church's outreach, promote discipleship, and create a church community. This final chapter is a culmination of all the research completed and a forward-looking perspective on church missions in a digital age. I discussed some of the responses I got from congregants and other participants and did an overview of how they affect the dissemination of religious information in the twenty-first century compared to past periods. The main objective, therefore, was to evaluate how digital worship, whether online or hybrid, affects engagement, spiritual growth, and community formation within a Christian context.

The research will address three major questions: how the Internet reshaped traditional worship structures, the theological consequences of these changes, and the ethical concerns raised by digital evangelism. For my prior research, I used Bible study sessions, interviews with clergy, group participation, workshops, and questionnaires to collect data from participants about hybrid evangelism. I was able to get various experiences and perceptions across different worship formats. The findings indicate that digital worship has advantages like accessibility and convenience. It also risks diminishing some aspects of the spiritual community and discipleship. Digital formats of worship alone fail to recreate the communities of physical churches. A hybrid approach, however, seems to be the way forward, as it serves various age group's needs. It creates convenience while not taking away from community engagement.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

In this chapter, I will describe how my ministry interests and skills relate to the needs of my ministry context, and in addition, determine how the relationship between my ministry interests and skills and the need of my context can form the basis for a Doctor of Ministry project. I will also offer a statement of the general nature and content of my project by developing a problem statement, hypothesis, and general plan of implementation for the Doctor of Ministry project.

My late mother used to tell stories about me. For example, when I was about one year old, I would crawl backward until one day there was a thunderstorm and, because I was afraid, began to crawl forward toward her. When I was around six years old, I was the entertainer in our home. I would dance and sing. I tried to mimic what I saw Michael Jackson do. I started singing in the church at six years old. I joined the usher board and became involved with the evangelical team and the missionary board. I liked going to church at that young age.

When I was four years old, I ran home from school, and my father whipped me back to school. I had my first crush on my kindergarten teacher. Her eyes were just so pretty. During my earlier years, I got into a lot of fights. I was occasionally jumped by a group of guys while in the second to the fourth grade. I spent many of my lunches with the teachers rather than playing with my peers, until I fought and beat the gang

ringleader. I then went around getting revenge on the whole gang. I thought my fighting days were over, but in the fifth grade, I became a patrol officer in school. I enjoyed doing that. However, a guy in my class started a fight with me. You could not fight and be a patrol officer, so I did not want to fight back, but I did. I kept my patrol belt on because the teacher knew I had not started the fight, and my classmates had also told him what they had seen. I defended myself, but I would not initiate a fight. I believe the fights I was in were caused by people wanting to jump on the big guy. I was always one of the tallest or biggest in my class. I was always a very quiet and serious child. As an adolescent, I did not fight as much and as stated earlier, I was a very serious child. I suppose in part because I felt that I had to take on responsibilities, given that my father was an alcoholic. Most kids do not have their father come to the school intoxicated and embarrass them in the process.

My brother and I would have to go looking for him and would often find him in the trash dump passed out from drinking. In some ways, I was a peacemaker because if it was not for my sister trying to stab my dad in the top of his head with a knife (I witnessed this, and miraculously it did not penetrate at all, something that I think about from time to time), it was my mother and father arguing. Who am I, you ask? I was a referee and at times tried to de-escalate my parents' disagreements and arguments. I can remember a time when my mom was on the phone and my father was drunk and he would talk, talk, talk. She told him to get out of her face. I told my dad to go upstairs or anywhere else. I thought to myself that this was not going to work out very well for him. My mother did not play. She just hit him in the head with the phone and kept talking. He looked at me and asked, "why did your mother do this?"

In addition, I liked playing sports, and I was pretty good. I played touch football in my neighborhood and was a pretty good sport. I knew how to win and was never a sore loser. I also joined the Young Marines, a program that the Marines set up for young people. In addition, I did a lot of singing in church. I would sing the lead, and I began to have a sense of God for myself. I was very young when I gave my life to the Lord, barely ten years old. No one had to coerce or make me walk up to the altar. I heard the preacher and decided to give my life to Christ. The church soon became a major part of my life.

When I think about it, my family was very dysfunctional. However, we did what so many families do, which is act like nothing was wrong. As far back as I can remember our home was very chaotic most times, and as a result, I had to be responsible for things that a fifteen-year-old boy should not have to deal with. I became the head of the household, as by this time, I was the only one out of my siblings living at home. I had two parents, but I felt like I was home alone. Often, I found myself being by myself at home. I played by myself or go outside and play.

By this time, I was active in church, was a good student in school, and no longer fighting. I played the trombone in my Junior High School band and was pretty good. That is when I made my first song arrangement. It was a rendition of "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer," which I will never forget. It was a hit. It was talked about for days after the concert. I loved music and discovered early on that I was very musically inclined. I took piano lessons for a while, but I stopped because my friends would tease me. They said that was for girls. I wrote a few songs at the age of fourteen, composing them right at my piano in our home. When I was about seventeen, I started traveling and singing with a local group out of Washington, DC. I was the lead singer in the group.

I also played football in high school and ran a 4.7 in my tenth-grade year. I was on track to play at an A1 school, but I got injured in eleventh grade during summer training camp, so I did not go back to playing football. I tried out for basketball and made the first cut, but I did not play because I became love-struck by the woman I eventually married. I liked the arts, whether it was singing, dancing, or acting, and fortunately, I had the opportunity to do them all. In 1994, I did a project with a group I was in. However, I stayed by myself a lot, but I did not mind; I was ok being alone. Although I was passiveaggressive, I did not want to ruffle any feathers or go against the grain. I always wanted peace for everyone I knew and encountered. Although I loved God, there was a time when I was not sure about my salvation, so I made a second trip to the altar. I did something I had no business doing and was convicted to the point of taking that walk again.

I graduated high school and had a full ride to the local college in DC. All I had to do was audition on a Saturday for a musical scholarship in the choir; however, I did not want to go to school anymore. I told my parents, and so did not go to the audition. This is one of the stupidest things I had ever done because the following year I ended up going to school and had to pay for it. I did not go to college partly because I was not focused on studying. I was in love and focused on my girlfriend. I even went to the vocational school for Information Technology Repair but did not finish because I was in love and ended up with a student loan and no diploma to show for it. We dated for four years and then got married. We were married for sixteen years and had four girls. She had two girls before the marriage, then we met and had two together.

In 1998, I did my initial sermon, and that year joined the United States Army. I served eight years honorably. While in the military, I pastored my first church in Korea. It

was a Church of God in Christ Church, the largest COGIC Church on the peninsula. I did not want to leave, but duty called. I also began to get a sharp pain in my side but did not pay too much attention to it because I was in the best shape of my life. It was not until I was getting out of the military and doing my out-processing that I discovered I had high blood pressure. I did not have a second thought about it and had no idea what it would or could cause. However, I did not address hypertension, and so a few years later, I was diagnosed with cardiomyopathy. My doctor told me my heart was beating like that of a sixty-year-old man. I got out of the military on May 8, 2005, and the next day became a contractor at the Pentagon; I worked as a contractor for the Department of Defense for eight years. I had my own business, Miracle Technology, and I was able to obtain a Department of Defense contract.

I did well for myself in business; the only problem was that I did not have someone to write proposals for me. Proposals were not one of my strong suits. In the government contracting business, you live or die by the contracts you amass. So, although it was short-lived, I learned a lot. I learned about how to start a business and how to get certain identifiers that would help me obtain not only personal credit but also business. I was very good at what I did in the technical industry and was a leader in some facets of all but one of my contracts. The last contract I never worked on was my dream contract, the one I had always wanted, to be on the tiger team for the United States of America. Yes, I had the opportunity to obtain a contract where I would be on the tiger team for POTUS. The day I walked into the building; I was taken off guard because the building we would be working from did not look like a government building. They gave me my badges and showed me where I would be working. They allowed me to leave early so that I could tie up any loose ends that I may have had and come in the next day with a fresh

start. I had walked not even a hundred paces when I felt in my spirit the Lord saying to me that it was time to go into full-time ministry. I thought to myself, “God, you have a sense of humor. You can’t be serious!”

I pastored at Thankful Baptist Church in Washington, DC, a very progressive church. When I got there, there were fifteen people in the Sunday service, and within nine months, there were one hundred. However, my pastorate ended abruptly because of six people, and now that I look back at this, I recognize God’s divine hand. That same day, while a lady was cursing me out, I heard the Lord ask me, “Are you ready to do what I asked you?” I replied, “Yes, Lord!” The following week, I planted the seed for the Restoration Bible Church, known today as Restoration Bible Church International. The Lord blessed us with thirty people at the first service, and all joined in the work, and we received $6,000.00 for our first offering.

About five years into my pastorate, my marriage became rocky. I had an affair and that caused a strain on my children, wife, and church. Reconciliation was attempted, but it was too late the damage was done. I told my wife that I no longer wanted to be married. My pastor had me go on a six-month sabbatical from my church to get myself together. One of the lessons I learned is that you cannot be effective going through something like this if you are leading while bleeding. It was a hard time when people left, money was short, and there was pain throughout the sanctuary. I asked God to have mercy on me. I repented and vowed to the Lord that if he gave me another chance at marriage and to serve his church, I would not let him down.

Nevertheless, my divorce was finalized in 2015, and within three years, my exwife passed away from cancer. I did not know she was ill until she was in her last three months. When I found out, I felt helpless; there was nothing I could do but pray. Neither

of us was perfect, but she had been a great mother and a strong support. She was quiet, but she would not let anyone take advantage of her. I miss her. She always had my back. She was loyal and supportive. She was a ride-or-die! All this was very hard on our girls, and we began the journey to heal and are doing well.

As I reflect on my life, I can recall some bad incidents. One of them is growing up with an alcoholic father. I can remember my dad being his own worst enemy. I can remember him embarrassing me in church. He was drunk asleep in church, yet they did not put him out. I was made fun of at school and in our neighborhood because my father was drinking in public, down at the corner, and everyone saw him, Monday to Saturday. On another occasion, one of my daughters was abused by the babysitter. She was badly beaten, but because she was the bishop's wife and my pastor's brother's wife, I did not take legal action, although I should have. That hurt me. That lady died just three weeks ago. My daughter was bruised very badly. Another bad memory is when my new wife and I were told that our daughter would have Down syndrome and that we should terminate the pregnancy. That was a tough time for us. When our daughter was born, she was unable to swallow and had to have heart surgery. Although the probability of her making it was slim, God pulled her through. That was a difficult period in our life.

The church has been a beacon of light in the community in the District Heights area. I will later expound on how our Restoration Bible Church International has been a beacon of light in the community and will share the nuances of the ministry, from its birth to where we are today. I will mention what it took to get the ministry off the ground. This will be an interesting conversation because I have been a part of this work since its inception sixteen years ago. We celebrated our Pastor and Church Anniversary on October 28-30, 2022. I will discuss the next phase of the conversation, which is historical.

Restoration Bible Church International (formerly known as Restoration Bible Church) was recognized under the Baptist denomination. We had five days of service for its recognition as a Baptist Church. The Church is in a community of disparity and economic challenges. The first service was held in December 2006 at Thirteenth and First St. in Washington, DC. Fifty people showed up, and thirty people joined. The first offering was $6,000.00. We stayed at that location until April 2007 before moving into an elementary school known at the time as Wilkerson Elementary School, and we partnered with the school to have afterschool study to help the young people with their schoolwork. We stayed there until October 2009; that year we moved into a space that was not shared. By the leading of the Lord, I told the church during a Sunday morning service that we would be moving into a building earlier that year and should prepare to move. At the time, however, I had no building to move the church into, nor did I know where to look. However, as I moved by faith to look for a new home for God's church, God provided.

By this time our church had grown to approximately one hundred disciples, I implemented various ministries within the church, including ushers, men, women, deacons, finance, praise, Christian Education, outreach, and evangelism ministry. At this location, we have fed those who needed food, clothed those who needed clothes, paid people's rent, and even housed people in hotels for a few days.

We joined one of the local Baptist Convention, namely the National Capitol Baptist Convention, where I served on the executive board under the leadership of Rev. Charles McNeil. I served as the Convention's Minister of Music until I had to step down due to my daughter's illness. Restoration has been instrumental in the fight for churches partnering with the collective group in our area while Prince George's County, in partnership with Andrews Air Force Base, succeeded in changing laws that would have

been detrimental to the religious community. In 2018, we allowed another church to use our space for worship. I am persuaded that we must help our brothers or sisters when in need. This was helpful both to them and to us. The church was planted in December 2006, and God has been faithful to us. During the sixteen years of this church's life, the number of disciples was minimal. Thanks to the grace of God, we partnered with Aldi's grocery store and, on several occasions gave away clothes to those who needed them.

Moreover, in 2019, COVID-19 struck the area, and we then found ourselves amidst a shutdown. Our church changed from in-person to virtual services. The blessing from this was that I began doing a broadcast on Facebook called "Restoring Your Life Today," during which I went live to share the word of God daily. During this time, members of our congregation became familiar with the social media platform when this catastrophe hit; there was no major learning curve because we had already been using social media live on Facebook. Thanks to my IT background, I got a platform, integrated it, and had four different social media platforms functioning at the same time, allowing people to choose which platform they wished. So, we had to train others to run the media platform that is integrated with the social media platforms. Throughout the pandemic, we made disciples virtually. Moreover, our present-day context is unique. Since April 2019, we have been worshipping in the virtual space. While other churches have returned to their building, we remained in our virtual space because we had not yet found a building to worship in. Until now! Our new location will be in Brandywine, Maryland. However, we have seen the hand of the Lord operating through the medium of the virtual space.

We currently do several things via our virtual space. We do not just have Sunday and Wednesday services. If hybrid models continue to be used in the church, in-person and virtual worship will increase engagement. The question I seek to answer is how to

create a connected community post-pandemic. Matthew 8:8 is a powerful and meaningful scripture: “The centurion replied, ‘Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But speak the word only, the word and my servant shall be healed.’”[1] The centurion’s words speak to his faith and trust in Jesus, and the passage can be seen as a model for all believers. In this chapter, I will explore Matthew 8:8 using the New Interpreter’s Bible, the Abingdon New Testament Commentaries, and the Oxford Bible Commentary. I will discuss the passage from a literary, historical, and theological perspective. I am using St. Matthew 8:8 because it speaks to the idea of not having to physically be in the same space but still receiving a word from the Lord virtually.

We also have several Zoom meetings consisting of our leader’s ministry meeting every week. With the help of God, we have been able to maneuver through this new maze of ministry. This ministry model has been effective in our current context. We won lost

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souls for Christ over the virtual space, and these lost souls have become active and support us financially. We had a recent church and pastor’s sixteenth-anniversary celebration in October 2022, in which I met some parishioners who connected to our church via the virtual space. It was certainly a blessing to meet them. I look forward to serving with them. Our anniversary celebration comprised both virtual and in-person worship. Some parishioners are from around the globe, from England to Africa, from Massachusetts to Florida. We have seen growth, and we give all glory to God.

Through this virtual space, we also have Sunday School and have seen it grow. We have been able to provide new disciples with orientation through Zoom. The order of

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[1] Biblical citations are from the King James Version, unless otherwise noted, Matthew 8:8.

our service is as follows: after opening with a countdown to the service, we have intercessory prayer for approximately fifteen minutes, then the scripture reading for the day. We have facilitated two classes thus far and are preparing to schedule another class this month. In our present-day context, we are preparing to re-enter the building. We will have Women's and Men's Ministry up and running, as well as youth, singles, and music ministry, to name only a few. We also have a Van Ministry that became dormant due to the pandemic. We have made sure that maintenance and insurance are kept current. The church van was used when the first family came to town for the celebration. We currently have two drivers but plan to have more drivers volunteer to serve in this capacity. We will also allow those wishing to serve in ministry to do so whether they are members of the church or not. We will have clothes drives and feed those who are hungry.

We have just leased a church in which to worship. This new facility will allow us to do the work that the scriptures teach us. We will care for the widow, feed the hungry, and clothe the naked. We will reintroduce our children's church, start a literacy program, and help our children with homework in an after-school program. We will have an addiction counseling program for alcoholism and substance abuse. We are preparing the new building to have internet and perform virtual services. We will keep our virtual presence because it has been a blessing to those who may never go back into the building. It is also a great opportunity to share Jesus with the masses beyond four walls.

Furthermore, I believe that my secular background aids in the formation and development of my project, particularly within the virtual space. I was in the Information Technology industry consistently from 1998 to 2014 and then from 2015 to 2016. I started by learning about various software programs while in the Army. I became familiar with Microsoft applications, the most challenging of which was Unix administration,

which had to do with coding. I then learned computer repair and made sure that the computer in question was on a secure classified and unsecure unclassified network. I was also responsible for cyber traffic throughout Korea and oversaw the refreshing of new computers by making sure that my team knew how to configure new machines using the new hardware and software. I received several awards from the Air Force for my stellar performance.

I learned from many before me and met a lot of great engineers, technicians, and administrators. I was even a part of the first voice-to-voice Microsoft that people are using now. Have you ever heard of Alexa? Well, that program had been released long before then. It was first introduced to me in the early 2000s. I would give Microsoft a command to open Word and it would open simply by voice activation. Technology is always evolving and by this time I had been out of the military and working in the contracting business, where via one of my contracts I was introduced to my first virtual experience. I was working for the General of the Army and was responsible for all inbound and out-bound communications around the world. It was adventurous, to say the least. There was always something going on.

As it was also a secret clearance space, I will share as much as I can. One thing I can say is that it was a sight to see the General speaking with two or even four people at a time from around the globe through widescreen monitors. I was responsible for that. The platform that I used was video teleconferencing or VTC. I ran that whole outfit, and it was there that I got to see the virtual space in operation. Its capability was awesome. You could see and hear the session at the same time, and if you wanted to mute an individual, you could. The last thing was a timer set up by another private provider, and when that time frame was done, so was that. Does that sound familiar? Yes, Zoom. But before Zoom

there was Microsoft Goto Meeting, and then other commercial companies were set up, like Black Space, where you could chat. Then came Facebook, and the rest is history.

This is what we are currently using to further the spread of the gospel in our local assembly. We started teaching two people how to use the platform Stream Yard; now we have four. Stream Yard is a platform that is integrated into Facebook and YouTube. We use those mediums simultaneously while streaming live. Six of our members have and use Zoom during our mid-week services. I think it important that we access the platforms that we use so that we have a refresher at least once a week to keep up our skills as much as possible. Other skill sets come into play with technology and having everyone remain up to speed with the platforms used. I also help other members access Facebook by providing a block of instruction and writing a cheat sheet, should they need assistance. Some of the congregants were not familiar with YouTube, so I had to help them get accustomed to and learn how to use the social media platform. Teaching technology to those who have never used these platforms takes patience, and because I have had years of experience helping users in government and the private sector, this is second nature to me. I enjoy helping people progress in their jobs because I taught them some pivotal skills. I also like to see the congregants achieve things in technology that they either had a fear of doing or thought they could not do.

Moreover, the time spent training the congregants has been invaluable to them, as they can use computers anywhere, they go. They can take their laptop or mobile device and use these mediums anywhere in the world where access is available. I have helped them find the network on their computers and obtain a connection so that they can explore our services.

This training also goes a long way to addressing their concerns. I also see the value in this training because it fosters a level of fellowship within members, causing them to police each other and help each other with what they have learned, enabling them to share what they know with their family and friends outside the local assembly. In addition, this is a great way to share the gospel, especially with anyone afraid to talk about Jesus or share Jesus from an evangelical perspective. These can serve the needs of my context in starting a hybrid model of worship post-pandemic. Having this model can foster an uninterrupted time of worship with those in the virtual space. Not only does the member witness the service during livestreaming, but it also gives the opportunity to go back, see, and replay the service.

This can also allow those at home or in the neighborhood to discuss the service, highlighting things that were of utmost importance to those in attendance. Many things of interest can take place during a livestream service experience. For instance, those in attendance in the virtual space can pray along with the service, read the scripture with the service, sing songs, and clap their hands. It is a space for those who do not want to drive to the church but would much rather remain in the comfort of their own home. Some people still have reservations about going into public spaces such as a church. A plus for the church is that it allows those who attend via the hybrid space the opportunity to give via technical means by using applications like Givlify or Cash App. This context will continue to progress using various other apps as time and technology continue to evolve. What is also still useful, particularly for senior citizens, is the portable DVD player. This allows them to see the services without interruption once mailed to them.

The gospel has been made available worldwide through every medium imaginable. In keeping with the materials needed to make the virtual space possible, the

church's technical equipment must meet the minimum requirements for platforms to be accessed. The first important thing that gives interest to our context for our doctoral project is that we must have the minimum requirements for bandwidth within the building. Our bandwidth is at least 300 gigabytes, which allows us to have enough bandwidth to access the internet. This is important because, without the proper bandwidth, the experience will be slow or continually buffer. We must also ensure we do not need a repeater to carry the signal throughout the building, as this would be unnecessary because of the size of the building.

Next, we must make sure that the sound equipment is set up correctly and functions within our context with two speakers that are at least fifteen inches each and have at least an eight-mic soundboard to accommodate the sound for the worship experience. Upon ensuring all the equipment is intact, we must verify that the levels are adequate for the live stream so that we can provide the best possible sound quality. In our context, this would mean that the cell phone must be tested before the service on a day when parties are available to run the test. The test must go from the Stream Yard platform and must be seen in the virtual space, which could be someone's home. Once they see the sending stream and the receiving stream, then they are connected.

For our context, you need a tripod that can easily mount the cell phone. The tripod is normally stationary except for the time of giving or during some emergency. The cell phone facilitator must know what is going on during the service because it informs the hybrid space, which informs the viewer when prayer is taking place or when praise and worship are occurring. Moreover, a minister can go to hospitals and share the services that are either live or in replay mode with the congregants. Having a cell phone helps with this aspect of the ministry, as members can be in the comfort of their homes while

being visited by the minister, who sends texts to the members with the day's scripture or a group text within our hybrid context. We also use email to provide our members with announcements to keep them informed about the church's upcoming activities and weekly worship times. This serves as a catalyst for my ministerial skillset and interest in the context of the local assembly covering my doctoral project.

Nevertheless, in looking at our ministerial skillsets and interests, I also describe the need for the general nature and content of my proposed project. Within the last two to three years, COVID-19 has put a major halt to in-person worship. This was costly on so many levels because it has also been attributed to governmental oversight. Some churches remained open during the pandemic, and many have lost their lives just by being in a sacred space. However, as we emerge from this pandemic, we see that some things have not changed and that a hybrid model of worship is a mainstay. Such postpandemic church services have become a natural occurrence for many who do not attend brick-and-mortar worship and have set a precedent for local members to worship from the convenience of their homes. Since COVID-19, church usage has relied greatly upon the virtual and hybrid space this has been the nature of most if not all means of communication and has been used in Christendom worldwide, as witnessed in every service regardless of denomination.

The hybrid method has been the primary means of enjoying midweek service and morning worship, including many other purposes. Someone can teach a group on Zoom on a Tuesday at noon and then have another one at 7:00 p.m. The hybrid model is the main way to communicate the Gospel of Jesus Christ today. People around the world are conditioned to use it. It is a part of their everyday life. It is used in worship just as it is in government. It is used for the most part in groups that have a positive impact. The content

of hybrid worship is all-encompassing. It is strongly contingent on its service and all other activities. From worship services to board meetings to prayer meetings to Bible studies, the virtual space is found everywhere. The cost of a good system, along with production, will depend on what a church may use to bring about a weekly experience via the virtual space. The content is our Kingdom worship. It is the Kingdom at work and can be seen around the world by different churches. The Bible talks about Saint Matthew chapter eight, where the centurion tells Jesus during his conversation that Jesus does not come to his home for his daughter to be healed, but that He could speak the word and the healing takes place. This is a classic act of seeing the gospel's content in operation. So, the idea of having a hybrid space is to make sure that this system is functioning properly and that those viewing the service have a great one. The hybrid is being used for all things about ministry.

When Lazarus was dead, his sisters sent word for Jesus to come. That was an example of the hybrid in action. He got the word and came within four days. This was a powerful move because Lazarus was raised from the tomb by the word of Jesus. My content for the proposed project is ever evolving and has been a blessing to many who have taken part in the discipleship of following Jesus by a hybrid model. With this proposed project and its general nature, the hybrid model has positive connotations because this can be ongoing, 365 days a year, without losing any traction or broadcast time. Its nature is such that it will always be continual, and that the gospel message will always be going on around the world. You can make videos and store them for future usage, and this is also the general purpose of the content.

Another positive aspect is that you can videotape a live stream and save it into the archive only to pull it up for special events or play it for the public at the discretion of the

Technical Director or the Minister. I am excited about this model because it is going to continue to grow disciples in their faith in God. I have been watching this type of virtual space on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Zoom, Ustream, and Yard Stream, and they are working to improve all these platforms. What I like about these platforms is that they are user-friendly, which creates repeat customers who have their own experiences to share with others.

Lastly, I would like to learn a plethora of things, but I will narrow it down to exploring the key themes and implications of this interdisciplinary relationship. One central theme is the transformative impact of digital communication on traditional religious practices. Another is to understand the historical, biblical, and theological foundations of digital communication in religious practices through which project stakeholders can develop strategies that leverage technology to deepen spiritual engagement, foster community building, and advance the mission of spreading the gospel message globally. Additionally, addressing ethical considerations such as inclusivity, privacy, and theological integrity ensures that online Christian communities remain inclusive, trustworthy, and faithful to their core beliefs. The integration of communication, theology, and the digital age offers a wealth of insights and opportunities for enhancing the practice and dissemination of Christianity in the modern world.

Information about the integration of communication, theology, and the digital age will profoundly influence my project. From historical foundations tracing the evolution of the internet to biblical insights into worship practices and theological reflections on evangelism in the digital era, the interdisciplinary relationship between these fields offers both opportunities and challenges for spreading Christianity in the modern age. The rise of online worship services, hybrid models of worship, and digital evangelism shows the

transformative impact of technology on religious practices, ultimately fostering a worship experience that is both engaging and interactive, with the church knowing how to be assertive and attentive to the needs of those that meet every weekend to give God the glory that is due his name.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

The church as we know it has found itself in a very unusual predicament over the last three-plus years. We have had to chart unfamiliar waters as many churches were forced to close their doors to their people with the onslaught of the raging COVID-19 pandemic. Even though the closed doors initially seemed to spell doom and gloom, we soon found out that though physical doors were closed, hearts and minds were being opened to new possibilities, which gave birth to new ways to reimagine the worship experience. Many churches did something they had never done before: they had to find ways to connect with their people without their physical presence. Fast-forward to this post-pandemic era and the return of people to the buildings, and many churches are hardly at half capacity and some parishioners have found that they can still experience the presence and power of God in worship without necessarily being in the physical building. This situation must give us pause to consider if we should move forward by going back to the way things were pre-pandemic, or if we must forge ahead with a reimagined mode of worship and with the idea that faith transcends being in the same physical space to experience the power of a God who cannot be limited by geography, nor His essence captured within the confines of brick and mortar.

I seek to buttress the idea that a hybrid model of worship is an undoubtedly needed model in this post-pandemic era. The hybrid model of worship is the answer to the glaring problem of how to create a connected community post-pandemic. My research further lends to the argument that if hybrid models continue to be used in the church, then in-person and virtual worship will increase engagement and consequently further the kingdom of God.

Christianity Today in their numerous studies has data that estimates that online attendance has tripled in 2020/2021.[2] To help us better understand this thought, I would like to have us look at the scripture Matthew 8:8. Matthew 8:8 is a powerful and meaningful scripture that reads, "The centurion replied, 'Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But say the word, and my servant will be healed." Wow! Following this verse of scripture, we are told that this centurion's understanding highlighted a paradigm shift that even those who had so closely followed Jesus had not been able to grasp. We are told that Jesus was amazed at his faith. The centurion, though a heathen and a Roman soldier, understood Jesus' authority, and knew in his being that His authority and power were not just potent in His presence alone. He saw Jesus as being so powerful that His word could carry the same power of His presence and touch.
Even Jesus notes that He had not found such faith in all Jerusalem.

On the bedrock of this centurion's revelation, we want to consider how we as the church can put our faith in gear enough to believe that the power and presence of the Lord can still be experienced in a virtual encounter. With the continuous advancement in technology, we must also advance our faith enough to leverage the power and presence of

[2] Jason Moore, *Both/And* (Plano, TX: invite PRESS, 2022*),* xxvii.

the word of God to reach those who need God but may not be inclined to step foot within the four walls of a church. This pericope can be seen as a model for all believers. As we proceed with this idea, I will take a deeper dive into Matthew 8:8 so we understand in context why this text was chosen and how we have operated beneath our privileges by being more like those in Jerusalem and even those who closely followed Jesus yet did not have enough faith to amaze Him.

It took a Roman soldier outside the circle to amaze Jesus and exemplify what incredible faith looks like. Through research, I will show how the church's model of worship and exploration of faith through the decades has not quite grasped the possibilities of what God's word can do, even without the congregation being physically present in the same space. In conclusion, I intend to prove beyond any reasonable doubt that the hybrid model of worship is the answer to the glaring problem of how to reach more of the lost and create a connected community post-pandemic. If we intentionally engage hybrid models of worship in the church, then in-person and virtual worship will increase engagement and inadvertently further the kingdom of God.

Exegesis

Matthew 8:8 is a powerful and meaningful scripture. It reads, "The centurion replied, 'Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed.'" There are several things depicted here that deserve taking a deeper dive into them. There are three people represented in this text that we should keep in mind to perceive how these individuals are also depicted in our time today. The objects of our attention are:

1.The Centurion

2. His Sick Servant

3. The Lord Jesus Christ

The Centurion

In the book, *Not by Sight: a Fresh Look at Old Stories of Walking by Faith***,** author John Bloom takes us on a journey of various stories of faith displayed. He has this to say of the Centurion who commanded Jesus' attention: "Jesus, The Founder and perfecter of our faith" (Heb. 12:2), once marveled at the great faith he found in a man. And it's the only instance recorded in the Gospels when Jesus responded that way. Who was this man? A rabbi? No. A disciple? Nope. A Roman soldier."[3] The term centurion, according to the *Dake Annotated Reference Bible*, refers to a captain of 100 men, which from a onesixtieth part of a whole Roman legion.[4]

The centurion was a Gentile, but to make matters worse, a Roman soldier. He was a man under authority and a man of authority. The centurion, by his response to Jesus, shows us that he had mastered the beauty of the dichotomy of being both a man under authority and a man of authority. The centurion, though a heathen and a Roman Soldier, recognizes Jesus' authority. Jon Bloom puts it this way, 'While Jewish elders asked Jesus

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questions like, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" (Mt. 21:23), this foreigner knew exactly who Jesus was. He knew Jesus had authority from the Father to command the natural world. He knew proximity was no factor. Jesus could speak disease out of existence from any distance."[5]

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[3] Jon Bloom, *Not by Sight: A Fresh Look at Old Stories of Walking by Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 103.

[4] Finis Dake, *Dake's Annotated Reference Bible: The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments of the Authorized or King James Version Text* (Lawrenceville, GA: Dake Publishing, 2014), 23.

[5] Bloom, *Not by Sight,* 106.

There are a couple of things we could stand to glean from this centurion. According to John Clowes in his book titled, *The Miracles of Jesus Christ, Explained According to Their Spiritual Meaning, in the Way of Question and Answer***,** we see evidence of his humility through his response to Jesus, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof…"[6] The second thing we can grasp is his confidence in the divine aid that Jesus can offer, which he expressed through the words, "speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.

The centurion, even though he had not walked with Jesus like the disciples, shows us his belief in Jesus' omnipresence and omnipotence. "It is a gospel irony that the only person recorded in the Gospels whose faith made Jesus marvel was a Roman soldier. The only reason he was in Palestine was to help keep the Jews under the domineering rule of the pagan Tiberius."[7]

We, like the centurion, must find ways to exemplify this level of faith when we consider our thought process toward our worship experiences. Our absolute confidence and trust in God's presence and power wherever and whenever His word shows up will command God's attention like this centurion commanded Jesus' attention. It almost

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appears that somehow this centurion had grasped the power of John 1:1, which reminds us that "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." When the Word of God shows up, it will behoove us to believe that God has shown up. The centurion says to Jesus, Sir, I know Your Word is as good as You are! You do not even have to come to my house for me to experience everything You have for my servant

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[6] J. Clowes, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Ernest Hartley Coleridge, *The Miracles of Jesus Christ, Explained According to Their Spiritual Meaning, in the Way of Question and Answer* (Manchester, UK: Printed for a Society of Gentleman, by J. Gleave, 1816), 7.

[7] Bloom, *Not by Sight*, 105.

if You step foot in my house. Just speak your word right where You are, and everything must come subject to what You have spoken. What a revelation!

What will happen when we dare to believe the transcendence of God's power through His Word? I daresay we will be catapulted to new levels of faith, the type of faith that commands God's attention. God responds to His word. The all-encompassing awesomeness of God's word is captured by David's declaration in Psalm 138:2 as he ended that verse with the words, "…for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name." The centurion demonstrates to us the power of God's word which cannot be hindered nor contained by distance or physical structure. According to Nathaniel Macon Crawford,

> WHEN the Lord Jesus Christ said, "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel," Mat. viii. 10 : Lu. vii. 9, he pronounced a eulogy inferior only to that which He will pronounce when He shall say, "Well done good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee a ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord," Mat. xxv. 21. The faith of the Centurion so highly commended has been recorded by the Holy Spirit for our instruction and has been a universal theme of applause.[8]

We must also see how this centurion serves as a shadow of the Gentiles coming to and having access to Jesus by faith. As Jon Bloom writes on the subject, "And Jesus

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marveled that in this Centurion he saw a first fruit and foreshadow of what he had come to bring about: that "many [would] come from the east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 8:11).

This man whose faith made Jesus marvel was not a disciple, performed no miracles, planted no churches, and had no degree or religious title. His spiritual résumé was unimpressive. The man with the greatest faith in Israel was a centurion who simply

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[8] Nathaniel Macon Crawford, *The Faithful Centurion* (Louisville, KY: South-western Pub. House, Graves, Marks, 2017), 3, http://hdl.handle.net/10392/5312.

knew who Jesus was, believed what He was able to do, humbly asked Him, and trusted that he would receive what he needed. He believed in Jesus.

This is still the faith that makes Jesus marvel. Jesus applauds the faith of a pagan and tells the ones who would otherwise have considered themselves the people of faith that they were lacking compared to the centurion. Hence the words that ensued, "Jesus… marveled at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith" (Lk. 7:9).

The centurion shows that all we need to get to Jesus and have Him reach us is our faith. "But without faith, it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11:6).

Today, anyone who believes by faith can access the same promises in Christ. Anyone who believes can experience salvation, healing, and freedom in Christ. The centurion therefore was and still is evidence that many who were not necessarily Jews or of the earthly seed of Abraham, would eventually through faith in Christ, access God.

The Sick Servant

The sick servant who was beloved by his master is at the heart of this miraculous display ignited by the faith and belief of the centurion. Milo Hatch Massey in his book, *Christ's Hall of Fame* gives us insight into this servant as follows:

> As our story develops, the Roman Centurion, whose name is not given, was greatly concerned about a faithful and beloved slave who was suffering from agonizing illness-paralysis of the most painful and fatal type. His love for his slave was a noteworthy fact. Such a slave, having no civil rights, could not have been put out of his suffering by quick death that might have been ordered at the caprice of his master. But not so here. This man loved his servant, who was his personal property, and who was in a position of servitude sanctioned by Roman law. He loved him with an

> appreciation and tenderness that might have been felt for a son. All agencies of relief for the slave's affliction had failed. The condition had become desperate…The centurion saw no hope for his servant except in Jesus. He had implicit faith in the ability of Jesus to heal him.[9]

Milo Massey continues by noting, "This poor slave, while the property of the centurion, was dear to him. There was no other besides himself to befriend him now. He remembered him who was in bonds as bound with him."[10]

I believe that this slave depicts many who need the touch of the savior. All of us are sick in some way, some more than others. The fact remains that only Jesus is the answer to a sick and dying world. As we are reminded in the Holy Writ, now it happened, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, that behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said his disciples, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick" (Mt. 9:10-12).

We all, like the slave, have once needed and still need the Lord's touch through His word. The world is suffused with sin-sick souls who can receive the answer nowhere else but from the word of the Lord. Oh, that we would be like the centurion who would advocate that the word of God be released into every home, and in every vicinity where there is a soul in need of the Savior! If only our hearts would pine for the ravaged souls around us as the centurions did for his servant. If only we could share in the bonds with which others are shackled and desire freedom for all, not just for some. The slave/servant, though not an immediate family member, was treated like a son by the centurion. We

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[9] Milo Hatch Massey, *Christ's Hall of Fame* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1943), 30.

[10] Massey, *Christ's Hall of Fame,* 33.

must remember that we all once were servants/slaves to sin. This was until the redemptive work of Christ set the captive free. Jesus paid the penalty for all sins past and present.

Baysmore's "A Historical Sketch of the First Colored Baptist Church" sheds insight as follows:

> As First, the covenant of works, do and live, or sin and die. This covenant was broken by our first parents sinning against God, in eating the forbidden fruit. This sin stains all of Adam's race, as it is written "in Adam all died," and God in His sovereign love made a covenant of redemption and salvation by grace, and this grace was concluded in Christ the promised seed, and God renewed the covenant to Abraham, and the law was added to guide men to walk in the covenant or bring man to Christ by faith. Hence it is written, "the law is our school master to bring us unto Christ.[11]

Can we pause to think what could have happened to this slave if his master did not beseech the Lord Jesus to release His life-giving, life-transforming word so that this

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servant at home may experience wholeness. Let us consider a world in which we rise like the centurion to place a faith-filled demand on the word of God to be released without a physical rally. The centurion saw the power of God for what it was, and this beloved servant was a benefactor of his forward thinking. Many could be benefactors of us taking the limits off the power of God and understanding that His power and presence are not limited to existing in a designated sanctuary alone. There are many a slave pining away, waiting on the word of the Master Jesus! The slave had a need that his master felt and approached Jesus to create a virtual miracle. Today, there is a need for a "felt needs" based approach in our worship and our seeking of the savior. In their book *Taking Flight with Creativity*, Len Wilson and Jason Moore write about the importance of considering

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[11] Joseph Basymore and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, "A Historical Sketch of the First Colored Baptist Church, Weldon, N.C.: With the Life and Labor of Elder Joseph Baysmore: With Four Collected Sermons" in *Documenting the American South (Project)* (Chapel Hill, NC: Academic Affairs Library, 2000), http://docsouth.unc.edu/church/baysmore/menu.html.

felt needs when designing worship in a collaborative process. Without considering the felt needs, our worship may feel out of touch.[12] The centurion was in touch with his servant's needs and as with the Lord Jesus' supreme power. Marrying these two will create an atmosphere that invites God to show up mightily in unprecedented ways.

We must consider the servant/slave who is within our reach. The church today must feel their need, and creatively through the power of the Word and Spirit of God, meet that need. We must rid our minds of the mental boundaries and blockades that create limiting beliefs that insinuate that there are things God cannot do when we are not physically together. As we move forward in this post-pandemic era, we must keep the pain of this servant in mind, knowing that healing is just a word away.

The Lord Jesus

This scripture in Matthew 8:8 in its context, as all scripture does, truly shows us the person and power of the Lord Jesus. In fact, in Philip Schaff's *The Person of Christ: The Miracle of History*, unpacks more insight as follows:

> The question of Christ is the question of Christianity, which is the manifestation of His life in the world; it is the question of the Church, which rests on Him as the immoveable rock; it is the question of history, which revolves around Him as the central sun of the moral universe; it is the question of every man, who instinctively yearns after Him as the object of his noblest and purest aspirations; it is a question of personal salvation, which can only be obtained in the blessed name of Jesus. The whole fabric of Christianity stands or falls within its divine-human Founder; and if it can never perish, it is because Christ lives, the same yesterday, to-day, and forever…The person of Christ is the great central miracle of history, and the strongest evidence of Christianity…From His

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[12] Len Wilson and Jason Moore, *Taking Flight with Creativity: Worship Design Teams That Work* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2009), 12, https://www.ministrymatterscom.dtl.idm.oclc.org/reader/9781426724541/#part01chapter01.html.

> miraculous Person, His miraculous works follow as an inevitable consequence.[13]

Truly no greater words could capture the essence of the Lord Jesus Christ who was marveled by the faith of the centurion in the eternal power of His Word.

The Lord Jesus and His Word are one! As it says in John 1:1, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Scripture is replete with texts that show us that the Lord Jesus is one with His word. He came from heaven to earth, was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, and died a sacrificial death. Even while on His earth’s journey, His authority and Lordship were unquestionable.

Lordship was at the heart of Jesus' restoring work on the cross. R. G. Lee spoke of the sovereign authority of Jesus' name in a sermon entitled **“**The Name Above Every Name,” from Philippians 2:9-10. He said, "The transcendence of the name of Jesus and its everlasting glory depends upon the work accomplished at the place called Calvary and at the open grave."[14] Even though the name of Jesus is above every other and cannot be compared to another, the word of God still tells us that His word is synonymous with His character and promise, or His Word is greater than everything. Hence the scripture in Psalm 138:2 declares, “I will worship toward Your holy temple, and praise Your name For Your lovingkindness and Your truth; For You have magnified Your word above all Your name”

In an article by Matthew Fletcher titled “How Has God Magnified His Word Over His Name?,” he surmises that "Your Word" in Psalm 138:2 refers to the Incarnate Word,

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[13] Philip Schaff, *The Person of Christ: The Miracle of History, with a Reply to Strauss and Renan, and a Collection of Testimonies of Unbelievers* (New York, NY: C. Scribner, 1866), 4.

[14] Robert Greene Lee, “The Name Above Every Name” (sermon given at Bellevue Baptist Church, Memphis, TN, 1938).

which means that God has magnified His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, above every other manifestation of Himself.[15] This is affirmed multiple times in the book of John alone: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (Jn. 1:14, 18).

Reconciling that the person of the Lord Jesus is fully backed by His word will help us further understand and embrace the idea that we can expect the fullness of all the Lord Jesus embodies to be manifest when His word is released. This is not based on location, or the number of people present at said location. The word and power of God remain unchanging.

This text further shows us that the Lord is not just able but also is very willing to show up on behalf of those who put their faith in Him. The verse before our key verse within the same chapter shows us that this was Jesus' plan. After the centurion expressed his servant's condition, we are told in verse seven, "And Jesus said to him, 'I will come and heal him.'" Jesus desires to show up when He is called upon. Consequently, what we see after the centurion's show of faith by expressing to Jesus to speak the word, is that Jesus will show up in person or virtually when faith shows up.

According to author Brain David, choosing Jesus is only possible by faith: "My righteous one shall live by faith" (Heb. 10:38). Faith is living in light of the invisible world, and to illustrate this principle, the author marshals many examples of faith from the Old Testament. These were men and women who demonstrated faith amid the threat

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[15] Matthew Fletcher, "How Has God Magnified His Word Over His Name?" Matthewhuntfletcher.com, http://www.matthewhuntfletcher.com/john1317/2007/12/how-has-godmagnified-his-word-above.html.

of death, impossible odds, their earthly pilgrimage, the future, and intense suffering. The hall of faith culminates in the greatest example of faith, Jesus Christ (Heb. 12:1- 21 3), and believers are exhorted to follow Jesus by accepting God's discipline (Heb. 12:4-11). Esau is presented as the ultimate example of not living by faith since he chose a bowl of soup over his birthright (Heb. 12:12-17). There are two worlds which we must choose—the visible world and the invisible better world. To make this decision, we must put on our faith glasses so that we can walk by faith.[16]

When it comes to our worship of God, we must put our faith glasses on, whether we are physically rallied together or in different places rallied and connected by faith in the Lord Jesus. We can fully experience the power and providence of God's mercy.

Jesus' heart was moved enough by the centurion's faith to release His word and power. I believe we too witnessed Jesus being moved by the faith of a people who believed Him even when they could not gather physically in His name. Throughout the pandemic, we witnessed Jesus releasing healing over hearts, minds, and even bodies as people called on His name from their homes or wherever they were.

People were truly challenged to consider where their faith truly resided. Was it in the Lord Jesus, or was it in the traditions we had built over the years? "And, too, they have failed to capture the utter simplicity of the Kingdom of God which is entered by faith in Christ the King and proceeds progressively and inevitably from the realized

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[16] Brian David Pate, "Choose Jesus: A Theology of the Book of Hebrews" (diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, 2017).

events of Christ's ministry, into our present experience, and onward to its consummation at the Parousia."[17]

The centurion challenges us to re-examine how we see worship and ministry, the ministry that the Lord Jesus Himself has called us to, and the propensity of its reach. "When we do the hard work of reimagining worship for a new medium, and we tell our old story in a new way for a new time, some who experience it will be so moved by the story that they'll want to experience it in person."[18] Miracles and the supernatural work of healing, deliverance, salvation, and sanctification take place when we dare to welcome the person and power of Jesus to move beyond our preconceived ideas of the structures we have put in place. The kingdom of God is not limited to our structures, and we are living in times when we have been forced to remember this truth. "In Q, Jesus' miracles

demonstrate the presence of the kingdom of God, which for Q signifies a state of eschatological blessedness for those who accept Jesus' message."[19]

The centurion shows us how to iterate forward through faith. Faith moves us forward and helps us to see God beyond a box. "We must iterate forward and find new ways to express the gospel considering all we've learned during the pandemic…Let me point out that the building represents safety and comfort. It's been a while since you were living in the thick of a lockdown or limited in-person gatherings. Reflect on the ways you

[17] Royce Gordon Gruenler and the University of Aberdeen, "Christ, the Kingdom and the Church" (diss., University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen, 1957).

[18] Moore, *Both/And,* 6.

[19] Myrick C. Shinall, "Miracles and the Kingdom of God in Mark and Q: Christology and Identity Among Jesus' Early Followers" (diss. Vanderbilt University, Nashville, 2016).

had to re-think ministry when it was unavailable to us."[20] The centurion was ahead of the ball game in iterating forward in ways that we can expect God to move.

Jesus, without fail, responded to this forward iteration by the centurion, "Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you. And his servant was healed that same hour" (Matt. 8:13). I can only imagine what we can experience by the hand of God if we believe that God can show up greatly for us virtually as we have up to now experienced Him showing up for us in our physical gatherings.

Up to this time, most of Jesus' miracles had been accomplished by Him laying His hands on people and declaring healing in their presence. Indeed, there was nothing wrong with the way Jesus had operated. The centurion reminds us that there is more to Him and more in Him, and it took His faith to bring it to manifestation. We, in like manner, must cause our faith to manifest great and mighty things that God has in store for

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us. We can see souls saved, revived, refilled, and renewed. Can we believe like the centurion did, and cause our faith to call forth a mighty manifestation? I believe the faith of the centurion moved Jesus until it didn't matter what his social status was or what his rank was being a General.

"Three Times Jesus Healed Without Touching" intimates the correlation between the Centurion's and Jesus' authority. This gives additional insight as follows:

> When the centurion refused to receive Jesus under His roof, he was essentially saying, 'You are a commanding General. You shouldn't have to come to my house. You have an army of angels and an arsenal of long-range healing power at

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[20] Moore, *Both/And,* 35.

> your disposal. It would be inefficient for you to come to my house. Just give the word and it will be done.[21]

As we continue to rethink ways to do ministry, we must consider integrative ways that are more efficient in reaching lives and availing ourselves of the presence and power of God. Let us iterate forward with faith and efficiency in mind. We serve a God who is willing and able to show up strong when we release faith and believe His omnipresence and omnipotence.

I hope this pericope has given us insight enough to embrace the idea that a hybrid model of worship is not just something to be desired in this era, but a transformational mode that is much needed. I pray the centurion's faith inspires and propels us to believe in God for bringing about great things even in our homes. As aforementioned, I believe strongly that the hybrid model of worship is the answer to the glaring problem of how to create a connected community post-pandemic.

Conclusion

I have desired to have us take a deeper dive into re-imagining our worship experiences through the lens of Jesus' encounter with the centurion. As we took a thorough look at the text, we discovered the centurion as a pioneer in faith, for lack of a better term. He dared to believe Jesus in a way that caused Jesus to marvel and had Him administer healing in a way He (Jesus) had never done before. God is looking to continue to do things differently if we welcome Him to do so.

[21] The Relevant Staff, "Three Times Jesus Healed Without Touching," *Relevant Magazine,* April 7, 2020, https://relevantmagazine.com/faith/three-times-jesus-healed-without-touching/.

A great thought leader and blogger of our time, Carey Nieuwhof, has this to say, "Too many church leaders will step back into the past the moment they step back into the building."[22] Jason Moore suggests that to ensure that we move forward in this dimension, we do not go backward but instead find the next iteration of worship at our churches. He encourages us to start a "Both/And" think tank. This group should be made up of leaders who represent people who primarily worship in person and those who primarily worship online, respectively. The group should look carefully and methodically at the worship experience offered before the pandemic in person (and even online if you were streaming then). Systematically discuss each aspect of worship and anything else that was part of the weekly routine. Ask which pieces resonated and which pieces still resonate today, considering an audience that is partially in-person and partially online. Ask how every aspect of worship you plan can include people gathered physically, and those gathered digitally/virtually.

Matthew 8:8 continues to remind us how we can have both ways and not limit how God can choose to move. After Jesus spoke the word and healed the centurion's servant, the next miracle He did was in person at Peter's house. "Now when Jesus had come into Peter's house, He saw his wife's mother lying sick with a fever. So, he touched her hand, and the fever left her. And she arose and served them. When evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a

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[22] Carey Nieuwhof, "Avoid This Big Mistake: Stepping Back into the Past When You Step Back into Your Building," Carenieuwhof.com, https:careynieuwhof.com/avoid-this-big-mistake-stepping-backinto-the-past-when-you-step-back-into-your-building/.

word, and healed all who were sick" (Mt. 8:14-16). So, we see from this text that the miracles of Jesus were not either-or situations, but more of a "both" situations.

Rev. Marilyn Weiler could not have put it more succinctly in a sermon she preached a couple of years ago. She said, "My friends, our unity as God's people causes us to celebrate and value extravagant hospitality. It calls us to create a place where we are connected, whether in person or via the Internet. It is a mutual sharing of lives and life stories."[23]

Just as the centurion disrupted the way Jesus had healed, we too, are living in an era of disruption, and we as the Ecclesia cannot afford to ignore it. Every other sector of society seems to have embraced this disruption, from transportation to media, to schools, to hospitality, and even to corporations. We would have been ahead of the game if we had followed this centurion's example. No longer should we limit the worship experience to just gathering in person, rather we should welcome, encourage, and embrace both modalities of worship.

In her literary work, *From Social Media to Social Ministry*, Nona Jones pontificates that the church is no longer a building. She writes: "Church is no longer a place. Google Insights reports that every month, more than thirty thousand people search Google using the phrase "church online." This means that people are actively searching the internet to connect with a community of faith that doesn't require getting into a car to drive to an address."[24]

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[23] Pine Grove UMC Worship, "The Tie That Binds – Anointed, Week 6," July 4, 2021, video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CM51FvayTRM.

[24] Nona Jones, *From Social Media to Social Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), 11.

Professor Teresa Berger, Yale liturgist Professor, points out that "virtual" liturgy is still embodiment. She says, "God is omnipresent. God doesn't have any greater trouble encountering us in the digital social space than in a hospital room, a refugee camp, a middle-class parish in Connecticut, or in my own kitchen or garden." She furthers her argument as follows:

> In fact, none of us can enter a digital social space without bodies. To be in a digital conversation with you right now, I need my eyes. I need my fingers to log into Zoom, the space which we've chosen to meet. There is no digital worship without bodies being present and involved…That is not to say that digital worship is better than in-person worship. It's just not disembodied. It's differently embodied. I think of worship and praise of God as something that extends way beyond humans gathering in a sanctuary…If embodied worship is the only valid form of worship, what are the implications for shut-ins, those incarcerated, and those who are differently abled and cannot participate in the typical embodied ways?[25]

Suffice to say, a hybrid model of worship is an undoubtedly needed model in this time and day. The hybrid model of worship is the answer to the conspicuous problem of how to create a connected community post-pandemic. We can carry along our elderly, differently abled, travelers, those who struggle with anxiety from being in large crowds, the sick and infirmed, or simply those who may prefer the efficiency of accessing worship virtually/digitally. I hope we can see and come to terms with the fact that if hybrid models continue to be used in the church, then in-person and virtual worship will increase engagement and further the kingdom of God.

[25] "Virtual Liturgy Is Still Embodied, Says This Yale Liturgist," *U.S Catholic* (interview), December 10, 2020, https://uscatholic.org/articles/202012/virtual-worship-is-still-embodied-liturgy-saysthis-yale-liturgist/.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

The Internet is a worldwide system of linked computer networks that exchange data and instructions using a standard language and set of protocols. It is a massive, intricate network revolutionizing communication, information sharing, and commerce. The ARPANET, an early form of the web, was created in the 1960s by the U.S. Division of Defense as a way for researchers and analysts all over the country to communicate with one another.[26] In the long run, the ARPANET was created in the cutting-edge web, comprised of millions of networked gadgets worldwide.

The internet has changed how we talk forever by facilitating instantaneous connections between individuals, regardless of physical location.[27] The way people communicate with each other has been revolutionized due to the broad accessibility of

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[26] James Curran, "Rethinking Internet History: James Curran," in *Misunderstanding the Internet* (London, UK: Routledge, 2012), https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203146484-6.

[27] Barry M. Leiner, Vinton G, Cerf, David D. Clark, Robert E. Kahn, Leonard Kleinrock, Daniel C. Lynch, Jon Postel, Larry G. Roberts, and Stephen Wolff, "A Brief History of the Internet," *Computer Communication Review* 39, no. 5 (October 7, 2009): 25, https://doi.org/10.1145/1629607.1629613.

social networking locales like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The Web has also revolutionized how information is disseminated and expanded.[28] Individuals may learn

almost any subject with only a few touches on a screen. It has leveled the playing field concerning education, making it conceivable for people of all financial foundations to get information and advance their education.

Also, e-commerce platforms like Amazon and Alibaba have revolutionized trade by permitting individuals to purchase and sell products and services online. As a result, modern digital advertising and payment processing markets have sprung up online.[29] The Web has various focal points but has numerous risks and challenges. The impact of social media on mental health and well-being is one such issue, alongside online privacy and security stresses, the proliferation of disinformation and false news, online badgering and cyberbullying, and more.[30] There has been a rise in the notoriety of "hybrid" worship services that blend in-person and online components. Various religious institutions have started giving online worship sessions to suit the developing number of people who choose to worship in the comfort of their own homes.

Online Bibles, religious writings, and sermons may now be accessed from any area, thus growing the reach of religious materials. As a result, people worldwide may

[28] Steven J. M. Jones, *Virtual Culture: Identity and Communication in Cybersociety* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publishing, 2002), 35, https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446250303.

[29] Huang, Huang, and Mak, "Agent-Based Workflow Management in Collaborative Product Development on the Internet," 138.

[30] Lee M. Ritterband, Linda A. Gonder-Frederick, Daniel J. Cox, Allan D. Clifton, Rebecca W. West, and Stephen Borowitz, "Internet Interventions: In Review, in Use, and into the Future," *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice* 34, no. 5 (October 1, 2003): 530, https://doi.org/10.1037/07357028.34.5.527.

precisely and effectively communicate with one another and share their religious convictions and practices, regardless of their physical area.[31] The internet has allowed religious groups to expand their influence beyond their physical sites, particularly in the hybrid model of worship. Due to the widespread COVID-19 epidemic, many churches and other houses of worship have had to shut their physical sites and relocate their services online.[32] The internet has allowed these groups to keep doing good work and keeping people connected even while society has grown apart.

The proliferation of accessible online materials has also allowed religious groups to assist their members in their spiritual development via the internet. Numerous groups, for instance, encourage online prayer communities, give online counseling, and have workshops on religious and otherworldly subjects. Moreover, the web has permitted the rise of virtual communities and discussion boards where individuals of diverse religions can find common ground.[33] People in a comparative otherworldly way can connect in these online communities to share their stories, look for advice, and offer support to one another.

This research aims to investigate how the proliferation of online religious content has affected the hybrid model of worship. This paper will offer an overview of the web and its centrality to the hybrid model of worship, investigating how the web has changed otherworldly practice and worship, from the advancement of online communities to the impact it has had on more conventional forms of worship. Issues of privacy and security,

[31] Jones, *Virtual Culture: Identity and Communication in Cybersociety*, 43.

[32] James Hendricksen, "Preaching in a Pandemic: Online Worship During the Lockdown is the Medium the Message?" (master's thesis, University of Alberta, Alberta, 2021), 3, https://doi.org/10.7939/r3-2rgt-kc96.

[33] Huang, Huang, and Mak, "Agent-Based Workflow Management," 133.

the multiplication of disinformation, and the impact of social media on mental well-being are just a few of the perils and challenges that will be investigated around utilizing the web in religious practice and worship.

The plausibility for new sorts of worship and the internet's part in fostering otherworldly development and advancement are points examined in this paper. This paper will focus on how the hybrid model may account for the effects of the internet on religious practice and worship. This study will examine the impact on established forms of spiritual life. The objective is to illuminate how the internet impacts religious life and spark in-depth conversations about adapting effectively to these changes.

The Development of the Internet

Today's Web can follow back to the late 1960s when the U.S. Office of Defense established the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (ARPANET).[34] This computer network would permit researchers and analysts nationwide to communicate with one another. The network's initial goal was to facilitate decentralized information and resource exchange among scientists engaged in defense-related research.[35] After its initial launch of just four nodes in 1969, the ARPANET quickly expanded as more academic and government institutions connected.[11] E-mail was made in the early 1970s so that computer users could communicate. In the 1980s, the ARPANET was separated

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[34] Curran, “Rethinking Internet History,” 43.

[35] Bruce Kogut, *The Global Internet Economy* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003), 77, https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/3300.001.0001.

into military and civilian systems.[12]

The non-military network, which connected research organizations and colleges throughout the United States, was called the National Science Foundation Network (NSFNET). The World Wide Web was made in the late 1980s and early 1990s to facilitate data sharing and dissemination online. Tim Berners-Lee, a physicist, and

computer researcher at European Council for Nuclear Research (CERN), is broadly credited as the creator of the World Wide Web.[36] Instead of typing in long text strings to get results from the Web, Berners-Lee created a graphical user interface. The creation of the World Wide Web was a watershed moment in the advancement of the Internet since it democratized access to the network and moved its focus from academics and specialists to the public.[37] Since then, the Web has developed further, with modern features and programs showing up often.

When it was first conceived, the ARPANET's reason was to serve as a decentralized network permitting scholastics working on defense-related projects to share information and resources. E-mail was made to communicate between network users as the network expanded.[38] E-mail made it simple for individuals from all over the world to talk with one another in a short time. Analysts could work together more productively on projects without having to schedule time for in-person meetings or use the phone.[39] New

[36] Ritterband et al., “Internet Interventions,” 532.

[37] Jones, *Virtual Culture*, 47.

[38] Curran, “Rethinking Internet History,” 43.

[39] Leiner, et al., “A Brief History of the Internet,” 27.

technologies and applications have contributed to the internet's ongoing advancement as a communication tool.

The coming of the World Wide Web in the 1990s was a watershed moment within the history of the Web as a means of worldwide communication and data exchange. The Web has become an irreplaceable means of communication, used by billions of individuals daily.[40] It has revolutionized human interaction by making worldwide connections as simple as clicking a button and facilitating momentary communication over great distances. The Web has become an actual exchange for religious groups looking to engage with their communities and give online worship services and materials within the hybrid show of worship system.[41] This has permitted religious groups to extend their spheres of impact past their physical sites, enabling them to reach more individuals and give more possibilities for interaction.

Different influential individuals and groups worked together to bring the Web to its current state as an effective communication tool. Reliable data transmission over the Web was made possible by Vint Cerf and Weave Kahn's creation of the Internet protocol (IP) and the transmission control protocol (TCP).[42] It is frequently agreed that Tim Berners-Lee made the World Wide Web. This graphical user interface has enabled millions to get to and exchange data online. Within the 1980s, the National Science Foundation (NSF) supported the creation of the NSFNET, which linked research

[40] Kogut, *The Global Internet Economy*, 63.
[41] Curran, “Rethinking Internet History,” 47.

[42] Curran, “Rethinking Internet History,” 52.

institutes and colleges throughout the United States.[43] The NSF also built the first web backbone to connect high-speed networks.

The Internet Protocol (IP), Transmission Control Convention (TCP), and Domain Name System (DNS) were all created by the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF), a worldwide organization. Tim Berners-Lee's World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) has been instrumental in establishing and popularizing Web standards, including HTML, CSS, and JavaScript since it was set up in 1994.[44] These individuals and groups and many others were instrumental in laying the framework for what would inevitably become the Internet as we know it today. The advancement of the internet as a means of communication has changed how we interact, access information, and do commerce.

The internet has tremendously influenced people's capacity to share and get information. It has revolutionized human interaction by making worldwide connections as simple as clicking a button and facilitating instantaneous communication over extraordinary distances.[45] Moreover, the internet has leveled the playing field regarding access to information, permitting individuals of all socioeconomic foundations to gain an understanding of any region they select. The internet has revolutionized communication through e-mail, IM, and social media by making real-time interaction possible. This has changed how people communicate with one another, permitting instantaneous connections over tremendous distances.

In addition, the internet has allowed the advancement of video and audio calling services, enabling users to communicate in real time while seeing and hearing each

[43] Curran, “Rethinking Internet History,” 70.

[44] Curran, “Rethinking Internet History,” 63.

[45] Leiner, et al., “A Brief History of the Internet,” 31.

other.[46] Besides, the internet has revolutionized data dissemination, giving simple access to voluminous amounts of information on essentially any subject. This has democratized access to education, permitting people of all financial backgrounds to assist their understanding of numerous subjects.[47] The internet has also progressed people's access to news and current events, with a few online news outlets giving momentary coverage of events worldwide. The expansion of social media platforms has also altered how people disseminate information and connect.

Thanks to social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, individuals can now reach a worldwide audience with their thoughts, opinions, and stories. As a result, people may now find others who share their interests and beliefs, fortifying their feeling of community. However, the Web has also presented new dangers and challenges in sharing information and holding conversations. For instance, confidence in institutions and the media may be undermined when people believe false or misleading data that spreads broadly on social media.[48] Since personal information is so easily shared and accessed online, privacy, and security online have become progressively critical.

The internet's impacts are seen in numerous distinctive areas of society and go well beyond simple communication and data sharing. The internet has revolutionized multiple fields, but three that stand out are education, commerce, and social media. The internet had a progressive effect on how students' study and get access to educational

[46] Daniel Robinson, "Voice in Worship: The Contemporary Worship Singer," in *Landscapes: The Arts, Aesthetics, and Education* (New York, NY: Springer International Publishing, 2014), 322, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-8851-9_19.

[47] Kogut, *The Global Internet Economy*, 73.

[48] Jason Whittaker, *The Internet: The Basics* (New York, NY: Psychology Press, 2002), 17.

materials. Thanks to Massive Online Courses (MOOC) and other online learning platforms, today's students can learn at their own pace whenever and wherever they like. In addition, online educational resources have revolutionized students' access to and use of academic data, including digital course readings, movies, and interactive learning tools.[49] The internet has revolutionized commerce by simplifying communication between organizations and their clientele. Shopping has been entirely transformed by the advent of e-commerce, which permits instantaneous, worldwide access to all products and services possible. Besides, the Web has allowed businesses to communicate specifically with their customers via social media, mail marketing, and other online channels.[50]

The rise of social media has significantly changed how people communicate and get information. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are social media sites that have revolutionized communication worldwide. Online news sources and citizen writers grant up-to-the-minute information on local, national, and worldwide news, making social media a significant source of news and information. The internet has brought benefits to these zones but has also presented new risks and challenges. The quality of online materials and the plausibility of copying and cheating have been considered issues in the education industry. Businesses must take safeguards to protect their online assets and customers' data from the developing threats of online fraud and cyber-attacks. Deception and false news are significant issues in the social media industry because they may have real-world impacts and harm people's faith in authorities and the news media.

[49] Kogut, *The Global Internet Economy*, 77.

[50] Whittaker, *The Internet: The Basics*, 17.

The Emergence of Online Worship

Churches, synagogues, mosques, and sanctuaries are all physical places where religious services have occurred. These buildings are broadly revered as holy places since they offer a gathering place for individuals of diverse beliefs to supplicate, think, and worship together.[51] Rituals and ceremonies provide the backbone of worship in various religions. Singing songs, saying prayers, listening to sermons, and partaking in sacraments like baptism and communion are all common features of Christian worship.[52]

Readings from the Torah, prayers, and community singing and chanting are all integral to Jewish liturgy. Prayers are spoken, and rituals are performed, such as bathing before prayer and facing Mecca, as part of the Islamic way of worship. These ancient modes of worship allow members of religious groups a feeling of belonging and continuity by tying them to previous generations.[53] However, with the rise of the internet, there has been a shift towards online worship, which enables members of different religious communities to gather in virtual spaces to pray, meditate, and praise their God.

Technological advancements have profoundly influenced worship in many religious societies. New media have given religious institutions a more comprehensive range of options for communicating with their followers, spreading their message, and

[51] Daniel Shaw and William Burrows, *Traditional Ritual as Christian Worship: Dangerous Syncretism or Necessary Hybridity?* (New York, NY: Orbis Books, 2018), 17.

[52] Shaw and Burrows, *Traditional Ritual as Christian Worship,* 17.

[53] Shaw and Burrows, *Traditional Ritual as Christian Worship*, 18.

even holding worship services.[54] The work of audio and visual equipment has been one of the foremost transformative perspectives of technology in worship. Varying media technologies, such as sound frameworks, projectors, and other devices, are increasingly used in religious institutions to improve the worship experience for individuals.[55] Multimedia components may be used in sermons and other religious lectures by playing music or films, showing scripture readings, etc.

Online services are another example of how technology has altered religious practice. By holding services online, religious groups may reach more people, including those who cannot physically attend services due to distance or other obstacles.[56] Worshippers may participate in online services from the consolation of their homes or while traveling.[57] In addition, the improvement of online communities has been helped by technological advancements, permitting individuals to interact with one another outside of the confines of the physical building. Individuals may connect, learn from one another, and exchange thoughts and experiences through various online forums and social networking sites.

However, technological progressions have also brought new risks and difficulties to religious institutions.[58] Organizations may need help to keep up with the quick rate of

[54] Ruth C. Duck, *Worship for the Whole People of God: Vital Worship for the Twenty First Century* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 73.

[55] Sandra Maria Van Opstal, *The Next Worship: Glorifying God in a Diverse World* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2022), 99.

[56] Duck, *Worship for the Whole People of God*, 73.

[57] Heidi A. Campbell and Michael W. DeLashmutt, "Studying Technology and Ecclesiology in Online Multi-Site Worship," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 29, no. 2 (May 1, 2014): 270, https://doi.org/10.1080/13537903.2014.903662.

[58] Van Opstal, *The Next Worship*, 99.

technological development, and they may risk alienating their members by depending too much on digital channels for worship and community building. Furthermore, there are risks associated with misinformation and fake news spreading on online platforms and privacy and security on the internet.

Online worship existed since the internet's earliest days when religious groups started exploring new forms of online connection and interaction. The first religious groups to utilize the internet to reach out to their communities did so in the 1990s, giving individuals online materials and hosting talk forums.[59] However, internet use for religious

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purposes has become widespread in the twenty-first century. Some churches and synagogues have begun live streaming their services online so adherents can join the action in real-time or catch up on missed sermons later. Other groups have developed online worship services incorporating multimedia elements like video, audio, and chat to create an authentic, otherworldly experience.

Due to lockdowns and social distancing tactics, several religious groups in 2020 were compelled to shut down their physical facilities, accelerating the move towards online worship.[60] The ability to worship online became crucial as religious groups sought to maintain contact with their communities and provide aid during the recession. To meet the requirements of their congregations, numerous religious institutions now offer inperson and online worship opportunities. Individuals may attend services at whatever point it is most convenient for them, no matter where they happen to be in the globe, thanks to the accessibility of online worship.[61] Churches and other religious groups may

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[59] Campbell and DeLashmutt, "Studying Technology and Ecclesiology," 272.
[60] Hendricksen, "Preaching in a Pandemic," 3.

[61] Van Opstal, *The Next Worship*, 103.

now connect with more individuals, grow their audience, and better serve their individuals by hosting services online.

Due to the advent of online worship, there has been a dramatic shift in how churches and other religious groups associated with their communities carry out acts of worship. As the church community sought more flexible and accessible worship options, online worship services arose to meet the growing demand.[62] By hosting services online, religious groups could accommodate members who were either physically unable to go to

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church or who just chose to worship in the privacy of their own homes. The advent of online worship has also allowed religious institutions to go beyond their physical sites, allowing them to connect with more people and open additional avenues for involvement.

The ability for religious groups to interact with their communities and provide online worship services and materials has made online worship a crucial tool for communication. The potential to foster fellowship among geographically scattered believers is one of the most profound results of online worship. With the advent of online worship, participants can better interact with one another and experience the benefits of communal worship.[63] Online services have also allowed churches and other religious groups to try new worship styles and include multimedia in their sessions.

Online worship services hosted by religious groups may now include video, audio, and other media presentation forms to engage further and inspire their congregations' members. However, there are risks and difficulties associated with online

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[62] Hendricksen, “Preaching in a Pandemic,” 5.

[63] Campbell and DeLashmutt, “Studying Technology and Ecclesiology,” 270.

worship that the church must consider.[64] One danger of depending entirely on virtual spaces for worship and community development might lead to alienation and separation from one's local church and its members. Furthermore, there are risks associated with misinformation and fake news spreading on online platforms and privacy and security on the internet.

Churches should weigh the benefits and drawbacks of online worship before adopting it. One of the foremost critical benefits of online worship is that it makes

religious services accessible to people who cannot go to nearby congregations. Individuals with hectic schedules who otherwise would make an effort to travel to a physical area can also benefit from this flexibility and comfort.[65] The accessibility of online worship services allows religious groups to expand their outreach beyond their immediate geographic area. In addition, the adaptability of online worship facilitates the exploration of new styles of prayer and the incorporation of multimedia components by religious institutions. Members may interact with one another and engage in acts of worship together via online worship, which can help develop a feeling of community and belonging.

There are, however, drawbacks to attending a virtual service of worship. The absence of members' physical engagement, a vital part of worship, might cause them to feel distant and cut off from the group.[66] Worshippers may feel frustrated if their service is interrupted by technical concerns, such as a lack of internet connection, that are beyond

[64] Hendricksen, “Preaching in a Pandemic,” 4.
[65] Robinson, “Voice in Worship,” 324.

[66] Van Opstal, *The Next Worship*, 99.

their control. Some members may be put off attending services online because they feel in-person worship needs more genuineness and intimacy.[67] It is also likely that sacraments like baptism and communion, which call for personal connection, cannot be performed correctly in an internet worship setting. Furthermore, members who need access to technology or are uncomfortable using digital platforms may find it challenging to participate in online worship.

Hybrid Worship Model and the Internet

The hybrid model of worship is a more adaptable and inclusive approach to worship that blends elements of traditional physical worship and internet worship. Because of the flexibility that the hybrid model affords, individuals with varying needs and interests may attend services either in person or online. Physical worship is still an essential part of the mixed form of worship since it allows members to worship together, build relationships, and interact with church-making. However, online worship is also integrated into the service, enabling members to take part in worship whenever and wherever they choose.

Many churches and other houses of worship have begun using a blended service because of the recent COVID-19 epidemic.[68] To better meet the needs of its members, several groups now give in-person and virtual worship options. Many churches now use a combination of traditional and contemporary elements in their services. Some groups

[67] Hendricksen, "Preaching in a Pandemic," 5.

[68] X. Luchenko, "The Digitalization of Worship Practices During the Coronavirus Pandemic in the Context of the Mediatization of Orthodoxy," *Gosudarstvo, Religiâ, Cerkov' V Rossii I Za Rubežom* 39, no. 1 (January 1, 2021): 43, https://doi.org/10.22394/2073-7203-2021-39-1-39-57.

now offer fully blended hybrid worship experiences, allowing members to attend inperson and online services together. Others have developed unique forms of online worship, such as online-only services or live broadcasts of traditional services.[69] Religious groups have tried out prerecorded services, simulated services, and worship based on social media are just some of the online worship formats.

The internet has been crucial to the growth of the hybrid worship paradigm since it has provided the resources for developing innovative and interactive services. Now

more than ever, faith communities can reach people all over the globe by providing them with online access to worship services via mediums like social media, video conferencing, and live streaming. Therefore, worship services are now more accessible and inclusive since members may participate wherever they happen. Because of the internet, religious groups may now go beyond their physical presence by establishing online communities. A sense of community and belonging may flourish when people have a place online to talk to one another and share their experiences. During the COVID-19 epidemic, when physical isolation measures were implemented, it was beneficial for religious groups to create communities online.[70]

Furthermore, the internet has allowed churches to try new worship styles and incorporate multimedia components into their services. Multimedia features like movies, music, and other visuals may enrich and enliven the worship experience for online attendees. Because of the internet, religious institutions now have the resources to develop hybrid worship services. Video conferencing and live streaming have allowed

[69] Luchenko, "The Digitalization of Worship Practices During the Coronavirus Pandemic," 44.
[70] Hendricksen, "Preaching in a Pandemic," 3.

groups to broadcast their in-person services, enabling followers to join in worship in real time or see archives of previous gatherings. The proliferation of Internet resources has allowed religious groups to provide their members with various worship options. With this adaptability, institutions may now provide worship services catering to multiple members' requirements and interests.

There are several advantages to adopting a hybrid worship style, especially now, amid the COVID-19 epidemic. Members who are unable to go to the church building due

to disability or distance may still take part in church services via this medium.[71] Worship services under the hybrid model may be attended at members' convenience, regardless of time, making it more accessible to those with hectic schedules. Members of the hybrid model may engage with one another and worship together, fostering a feeling of community and belonging. Finally, the hybrid model of worship enables religious institutions to respond to emerging needs, such as lockdowns and social distancing measures, by offering various worship options. Some congregations have adopted the blended style of service. The Atlanta, Georgia-based North Point Community Church welcomes worshippers in person and online via live-streamed services, on-demand videos, and podcasts.[72]

Sydney, Australia's Hillsong Church, has adopted a multi-platform worship strategy that blends traditional in-person services with digital broadcasts and social media.[73] Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California, provides a multifaceted worship

[71] Hendricksen, “Preaching in a Pandemic,” 3.

[72] Hendricksen, “Preaching in a Pandemic,” 3.

[73] Hendricksen, “Preaching in a Pandemic,” 3.

experience that combines conventional benefits with live webcasts and virtual reality.[74] Live streaming, on-demand video, and podcasts are just a few online worship options available via Life Church in Edmond, Oklahoma.[75] The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of the hybrid worship paradigm, which enables religious institutions to maintain contact with their communities and aid those in need despite the epidemic.[76] When physical barriers make it impossible for members to attend in-person services, the hybrid model offers a flexible and accessible alternative that allows them to continue worshipping and feeling a part of the community.

Criticisms of Online and Hybrid Worship

Some religious leaders and followers believe online worship is not a valid expression of faith. Online worship has been criticized for lacking the personal connection and physical presence integral to the worship experience. Online worship has been criticized by skeptics who say it cannot compare to the spiritual experience of attending a physical service.[77] Some people claim you can get a different sense of community and belonging from worshiping online than you would at a physical location. The lack of a physical space to perform sacraments like baptism and communion is another argument against online worship. Sacraments are an integral part of religious

[74] Hendricksen, "Preaching in a Pandemic," 3.

[75] Hendricksen, "Preaching in a Pandemic," 3.

[76] Hendricksen, "Preaching in a Pandemic," 3.

[77] Dave Browning, *Hybrid Church: The Fusion of Intimacy and Impact* (New York, NY: John Wiley and Sons, 2010), 17.

practice, and critics claim that online worship cannot replace physical worship in this respect. Worshipping online has been criticized by skeptics who say it takes away from the spiritual experience of worship. They worry that people will be too tempted to tune out the spiritual aspects of worship due to the ease with which online services can be accessed from anywhere.

Another argument against Internet services is the potential for technical issues to detract from the worship experience. Some people may feel excluded from online worship because they need access to technology or more confidence in utilizing digital

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platforms. The critiques of online worship have influenced the adoption of the hybrid form of prayer.[78] Some religious leaders and worshippers have voiced worries about the limits of online worship and its effect on the spiritual experience of prayer. Some religious institutions, mindful of the benefits and drawbacks of online worship, have adopted a hybrid model of devotion to strike a happy medium between the two. The absence of physical engagement and face-to-face connection may lessen the spiritual experience of worship. Therefore, some religious groups have been reluctant to embrace the hybrid style of prayer completely.

Nevertheless, other religious groups have taken action to address these concerns by adopting a hybrid model of prayer in response to the criticisms of online worship. Some religious groups, for instance, have developed mixed worship experiences that seamlessly combine in-person and online attendance.[79] These groups are responding to the criticisms of online worship by creating a service that bridges the gap between

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[78] Browning, *Hybrid Church*, 22.

[79] Afeosemime Adogame and Elizabeth S. Olson, *Christianity in the Modern World: Changes and Controversies* (Burlington, VT: Routledge, 2014), 78.

traditional worship and the convenience and adaptability of online services. In addition, considering the critiques against online worship, several religious institutions have begun to embrace technological innovation in worship.[80] Some faith-based groups, for instance, have adopted Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality (VRAR) to facilitate online worship services with a sense of physical presence and interaction on par with in-person gatherings.

By combining traditional in-person services with digital elements, the hybrid model of worship may answer the objections raised against online worship. The spiritual experience of prayer might be lessened online because of the absence of physical engagement and face-to-face connection.[81] To counteract this, the hybrid worship model incorporates online and in-person services, giving believers the best of both worlds. Members can attend in-person and virtual services, depending on their schedules and preferences. This combines traditional and digital worship's best features into one cohesive service. The hybrid worship approach may also respond to the claim that virtual services cannot replace in-person sacraments. As part of the mixed worship approach, sacraments like baptism and communion are administered in person and online (through live streaming or recorded footage).

The possibility for internet worship to detract from spiritual experience is another argument against it. The hybrid model of worship responds to this critique by combining the best features of online and in-person worship services to provide a more well-rounded

[80] Browning, *Hybrid Church*, 30.
[81] Browning, *Hybrid Church*, 17.

spiritual experience. However, it may be difficult for religious institutions to adopt the hybrid worship model.[82] Additional resources, such as technology and personnel, are needed to support the varied worship experience, which presents a significant challenge. Resources like high-quality audio and video equipment, live streaming software, and competent staff are required to provide a thriving online worship service.

Furthermore, the hybrid worship model necessitates meticulous preparation and coordination to ensure a smooth transition between the online and in-person worship

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experiences. The necessity for straightforward communication with members is another obstacle to introducing the hybrid form of worship.[83] Religious institutions are responsible for educating their followers on the merits of the hybrid worship model and outlining the steps necessary for them to participate in in-person and online services.

The Future of Worship and the Internet

The internet possesses the capacity to considerably influence the trajectory of worship in the future, as it presents religious institutions with novel prospects to interact with their congregations and provide worship encounters that are both tangible and digital. The potential impact of the internet on the future of worship lies in the emergence of novel technologies and platforms that augment the worship experience. Virtual and augmented reality technologies have been utilized to develop immersive worship experiences that offer physical presence and interaction, even in an online setting. With the ongoing evolution of these technologies, they will probably assume greater

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[82] Adogame and Olson, *Christianity in the Modern World*, 78.

[83] Teresa Berger, *@ Worship: Liturgical Practices in Digital Worlds* (New York, NY: Taylor and Francis, 2017), 43.

significance in the future of religious worship. The internet is poised to influence the future of worship by affording religious institutions novel avenues to engage with their congregations and provide worship services that are more comprehensive and accommodating.

The Internet serves as a medium for religious institutions to connect with members who may face physical limitations in attending traditional services and to provide customized worship experiences that cater to their congregations' varied needs and inclinations. In addition, the internet will likely significantly impact the evolution of

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religious practices, as it offers novel avenues for fostering virtual communal connections.[84] Social media platforms and online forums provide virtual environments for individuals to interact and participate in collaborative activities, thereby cultivating a sense of fellowship and inclusion that transcends the geographical confines of the religious institution. Moreover, the internet will likely influence the forthcoming worship by affording religious institutions novel avenues to extend outreach to the broader populace and furnish assistance and amenities. Religious institutions can utilize digital platforms to provide counseling services, educational materials, and additional aid to their congregations.

The potential impact of emerging technologies on the future of worship is significant and multifaceted. The employment of virtual and augmented reality technologies has been observed in creating immersive worship experiences, which facilitate physical presence and interaction, even in an online milieu.[85] Likewise, the utilization of artificial intelligence technologies is underway to create virtual assistants

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[84] Berger, *@ Worship*, 55.

[85] Berger, *@ Worship*, 53.

and chatbots capable of offering tailored assistance and direction to congregants. Additionally, wearable technologies like smartwatches and fitness trackers can monitor physical activity and health-related metrics throughout religious ceremonies. Social media platforms and online forums offer virtual environments for individuals to interact and participate in communal activities, thereby cultivating a sense of fellowship and inclusion that transcends the geographical constraints of religious institutions.

The utilization of streaming and video technologies has been observed in providing online worship services and facilitating hybrid worship models. This has created novel prospects for congregants to partake in worship services from any geographical location and at their convenience.[86] These technologies will likely transform how worship is encountered, creating novel avenues for members to connect and their respective communities.[87] The advent of emerging technologies has significantly impacted the practice of worship. Religious organizations must adapt and incorporate these technologies into their worship experiences to maintain relevance and engagement with their communities.

Incorporating technology within religious worship's context poses promising prospects and obstacles for religious institutions. Technology has the potential to enrich the worship experience by offering novel avenues for participation, fostering a sense of community, and facilitating outreach efforts. Conversely, incorporating technology may

[86] Tim Hutchings, "Contemporary Religious Community and the Online Church," *Information, Communication and Society* 14, no. 8 (November 18, 2011): 1119, https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118x.2011.591410.

[87] Berger, *@ Worship*, 50.

pose technical, logistical, and financial impediments. Technology integration in worship poses a significant challenge due to the requirement of supplementary resources such as hardware, software, and personnel. Religious institutions may consider investing in topnotch audio and video equipment, live streaming software, and skilled personnel to oversee the virtual worship experience.

Moreover, incorporating technology necessitates meticulous preparation and synchronization to guarantee the smooth integration of in-person and virtual religious

practices. One of the challenges in integrating technology into religious worship is the requirement to balance technology's advantages and the constraints of virtual worship.[88] Although technology has the potential to augment the worship experience, it can only partially substitute the significance of interpersonal engagement and direct communication, both of which are fundamental to the act of worship. Thus, religious institutions must adopt a versatile approach toward worship, facilitating avenues for tangible engagement and interpersonal communication while simultaneously integrating the advantages of technological advancements.[89]

Notwithstanding these challenges, integrating technology into religious worship offers noteworthy prospects for religious institutions. The utilization of technology can augment religious observance by creating novel opportunities for involvement, fostering communal ties, and expanding outreach efforts.[90] Technologies such as virtual reality and augmented reality have the potential to generate immersive worship experiences that

[88] Adogame and Olson, *Christianity in the Modern World*, 83.

[89] Hutchings, "Contemporary Religious Community," 1119.

[90] Adogame and Olson, *Christianity in the Modern World*, 88.

offer a feeling of physical presence and interaction, even in a digital setting. Online forums and social media platforms provide opportunities for individuals to connect and interact with one another, promoting a feeling of community and inclusivity that transcends the geographical limitations of religious institutions.

Conclusion

Incorporating technology within the context of worship poses potential advantages and disadvantages for religious institutions. Technology can improve the spiritual experience by offering novel avenues for participation, fostering social connections, and expanding outreach efforts. Conversely, incorporating technology may pose technical, logistical, and financial obstacles. Technology integration in worship poses a significant challenge due to the requirement of supplementary resources such as hardware, software, and personnel. Religious institutions may require investment in topnotch audio and video equipment, live streaming software, and skilled personnel to oversee the virtual worship experience. Moreover, incorporating technology may necessitate meticulous strategizing and synchronization to guarantee the seamless integration of in-person and virtual religious observances.

One of the challenges in incorporating technology into religious worship is the requirement to balance technology's advantages and the constraints of remote worship. Although technology has the potential to augment the worship experience, it is incapable of completely substituting the significance of interpersonal engagement and direct

communication, both of which are fundamental to the act of worship. Thus, religious institutions must adopt a versatile approach toward prayer, which entails facilitating avenues for bodily engagement and interpersonal communication while simultaneously integrating the advantages of technology. Notwithstanding these challenges, incorporating technology in religious services offers noteworthy prospects for faith-based institutions. Technology implementation can augment religious observance by affording novel prospects for involvement, fostering communal ties, and expanding outreach efforts. Utilizing virtual and augmented reality technologies can facilitate the creation of immersive worship experiences that offer physical presence and interaction, even in a digital setting. Social media platforms and online forums have the potential to facilitate connectivity and engagement among members, thereby promoting a sense of community and belonging that transcends the geographical confines of the church.

The discoveries presented in this manuscript can contribute valuably to advancing a doctoral undertaking through various means. The chapter thoroughly examines the historical underpinnings of the internet and its influence on religious practices. The information may serve as a method to situate the emergence of the hybrid worship model within its appropriate context and establish a foundation for a subsequent investigation into this subject matter. The article explores the difficulties and potential advantages linked to the incorporation of technology within religious ceremonies. The information above can be utilized to pinpoint distinct obstacles and prospects pertinent to a specific religious institution and formulate tactics for tackling them. The chapter concludes by presenting an analysis of the future of worship in the context of the internet. It includes a comprehensive overview of emerging technologies and their potential implications for worship. The information above can aid in pinpointing domains that require additional

investigation and examination, as well as devising tactics for integrating nascent technologies into the act of worship.

Regarding the ultimate reflections on the future of worship and the internet, it is evident that technology will progressively assume a more significant function in the worship encounter. Acknowledging the limitations of virtual worship, it is noteworthy that emerging technologies present substantial prospects for engagement, community development, and outreach. Religious institutions are anticipated to increasingly rely on the internet and emerging technologies to cater to their congregations' evolving needs and preferences in the future. Adopting a flexible and balanced outlook when incorporating technology into religious practices is crucial, considering virtual worship's advantages and drawbacks.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

Theological systems of a particular religion are formed based on certain foundational beliefs, doctrines, values, and principles. Such foundations are referred to as theological foundations and are central to constructing different theological perspectives. In Christianity, for example, these foundations may be the belief in one God, the Bible's authority to lead and guide Christians, and the power of Jesus Christ to save the world from sins.[91] Theological themes are slightly different from foundations in that they are the common topics of inquiry explored in a particular religion. In Christianity, some of the significant theological themes are humanity, which describes the nature of Christianity and the role that Christians play in understanding the concept of God; the redemption narrative as discussed in the Bible; community; and, most importantly, mission and evangelism. Missiology, also known as mission studies and Christian missions. Various generations of Christians adopted multiple ways of exploring the word of God and spreading it widely.[92] Missiology covers not only the spread of the word of God but also

[91] Owen C. Thomas and Ellen K. Wondra, *Introduction to Theology* (New York, NY: Morehouse Publishing, 2002), 12.

[92] Thomas and Wondra, *Introduction to Theology*, 12.

the issues related to mission practice, limitations to Christian missions, and the church's role in carrying out missiology.

This chapter seeks to discuss missiology as a theological theme. The story of the Great Commission in the New Testament will reinforce the idea. The spread of the word is affected by various factors in our generation. The dissemination of religious teachings today is highly influenced by factors such as communication technology, where the advent of the internet, social media, and digital communication has impacted the spread of religious messages, reaching a vast audience.[93] While the internet is a great tool, it also has its downside, where people opt to listen to religious materials in the comfort of their homes, therefore neglecting physical churches.

Further, the internet may need to offer more accurate information on interpreting Christian teachings. As explained in the Historical Foundations Chapter, the internet has transformed how the word is spread and how people perceive religious teachings today.[94] This chapter discussed the role of the internet in promoting missiology, describe the theological issues that have arisen since the onset of the internet, and provide theological answers and recommendations for this project about the Great Commission as discussed in the New Testament.

[93] Boaheng, "Online Church “Community” and the Great Commission,” 29.

[94] Boaheng, "Online Church “Community” and the Great Commission,” 30.

Prior Research

The advent of the internet changed how people communicated by providing fast and instantaneous connections between people regardless of their physical relationships.

The world became a global village where people, as far as they seemed to be from each other, could communicate easily. The internet saw the development of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. These social media sites have enabled people to revolutionize and disseminate information quickly and expansively. Apart from social media, other platforms have emerged, such as e-commerce apps that allow purchasing and delivering products and services online. The internet has relevantly been impactful in the Christian community as well. Online Bibles, religious readings, and sermons are now accessible from anywhere, meaning there is a growing community of Christians online. While risks and challenges are associated with such information, it has made it easy for people to access religious information and develop sustainable online religious communities. Online religious communities became important during the COVID-19 epidemic when people were on lockdown and could not attend church.[95] People began to share inspiration online, and most churches switched from their physical worship places and moved to sharing their services and sermons online. While the move is excellent, and more people can access information, the internet is slowly causing the death of the hybrid model of worship where people would attend physical churches.

Concerning the theological theme at hand, the internet has dramatically promoted missiology. The internet has enabled most churches to schedule services, support groups,

[95] John R Bryson, Lauren Andres, and Andrew Davies, "COVID-19, Virtual Church Services and a New Temporary Geography of Home," *Tijdschr Econ Soc Geogr* 111, no. 3 (2020): 360-372.

and other online materials that are accessible at any time and at any place. New media have given religious institutions a more comprehensive range of options for communicating with their followers, spreading their message, and even holding worship services. Mission and evangelism are the core of the spread of the word. Evangelism

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ensures that the proper religious message is shared with people, therefore avoiding misleading information. In the Bible, Jesus commissioned his disciples, according to Matthew 28:18-20 (NIV), gives Christians the missionary mandate where they have the sole responsibility of sharing the word of God with all nations and people of all backgrounds. The world has become more and more interconnected with the help of the internet; and therefore, discipleship has become more accessible, especially for theologians. The relationship between advancement of the internet, the theological theme under study-missiology, and the Great Commission in New Testament provide an exciting area of study in undertaking theological foundations and answering some questions that might arise in analyzing the relationship between the three subjects.

Problem Statement

The advent of the internet has influenced how evangelism and missiology are carried out within the Christian religious community. The internet has provided unprecedented information and a global platform for global outreach, therefore enhancing Christian communication. Within this context, this research aims to explore and understand missiology as a theological theme that the Great Commission reinforces according to the Book of Matthew. This study will seek to understand how the internet plays a transformational role in evangelism, especially for the present generation. The chapter will also consider classical theological means of communication and see how

missiology has evolved in terms of communication and outreach. By exploring various missiology approaches of this era, this research will answer the question of the role that the internet plays in fulfilling the instructions of the Great Commission.

Hypothesis

Using the internet to carry out missions makes it easier to spread the word and is a significant step in fulfilling the evangelical role of the Great Commission in the New Testament. This chapter explores the theological theme of missiology in the context of the Great Commission while investigating how the internet has been pivotal in enhancing mission efforts in this generation. The hypothesis, therefore, suggests that the internet, if used effectively from a theological perspective, can improve the impact of Christians' mission work, thus fulfilling the mandate of Christians as in the Great Commission by Jesus Christ.

Classical Methods of Carrying out Missions

The Great Commission

The Great Commission in Matthew happened right before the ascension of Jesus Christ. Before Jesus ascends to heaven, he calls his disciples and asserts his authority over the world. Jesus says, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matt. 28:18, NIV), a statement that declares his authority over all creation. Jesus gives the disciples clear instructions, telling them that they should go and make disciples out of all nations and follow everything that Jesus has taught and commanded them to do. This instruction is seen in the gospel of (Matt. 28:19-20, NIV) where he says, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."

These instructions that Jesus Christ gives to his disciples involve spreading the teachings of Jesus. This is the first point in the Bible where evangelism is declared. Like disciples of Jesus, Christians still carry out evangelism by spreading the word of God to all nations. This is, however, declining within this century due to the evolution in means of communication, mainly caused by the advent of the internet. The message of evangelism by Jesus Christ requires that the statements be spread universally. Evangelism is a universal calling, and it does not discriminate by ethnicity, race, or even religious affiliation.[96] The Great Commission, as in the Gospel of Mathew, is one of the earliest, and there is a classical call for evangelism. The Great Commission is still an ongoing responsibility for Christians today. Over the years, the Great Commission has been used to shape Christian missiology and evangelism and is seen as a driving force for the spread of Christianity until today.[97]

Prayer

Prayer is a classical mode of carrying out missions and evangelism. Praying is generally seeking divine protection and guidance while spreading tasks. In the Bible, the early church in the Books of Acts regularly took part in prayer as a way of evangelism.[98] In the Book of Acts 1:14 (NIV), "They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers." Members of the church would constantly take part in prayer, and this was seen as a mode of evangelism

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[96] Glenn Young, *Reading and Praying Online: The Continuity of Religion Online and Online Religion in Internet Christianity* (New York, NY: Abingdon, 2013), 93-106.

[97] Boaheng, "Online Church “Community” and the Great Commission,” 33.

[98] Paul F. Bradshaw, *Daily Prayer in the Early Church: A Study of the Origin and Early Development of the Divine Office* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2008), 46-50.

in the early church, similarly before Saul would be converted to Paul.[99] Ananias received instructions after he prayed to God. The apostles and early believers would often use prayer to minister and spread the gospel while asking for divine guidance.

In the story of the Jerusalem council, the congregation of the early church were participating in evangelism when the question of whether Gentiles should be involved among believers arose.[100] The leaders would then gather in Jerusalem to discuss the issue and would later resolve it through prayer, according to the Book of Acts chapter fifteen. Over the years, prayer has evolved, especially in the present century, where it still plays the exact role of intervention. With the onset of globalization and technology, missionaries can connect with people worldwide, and prayer networks are becoming more and more common. Intercessory prayer ministries have also been established with modernity to distribute individuals with the power to intercede among Christians globally.[101] In this century, prayer in missiology and evangelism has evolved to accommodate the changing times, and the foundational role of worship remains.

Church Communities

Church communities have been the core for spreading the word of God for the longest time. Historically, church communities are a classical means of evangelism. These communities serve as places of worship, fellowship, and outreach, and they play a

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[99] Duane L. Anderson, "The Development of the Early Church," Integrity, Integrity/deveachrhttps://serveandequip.org/Topical/dla_devearlychurch-t0-0095.pdf.

[100] Duane L. Anderson, "The Development of the Early Church," Integrity, Integrity/deveachrhttps://serveandequip.org/Topical/dla_devearlychurch-t0-0095.pdf.

[101] Bradshaw, *Daily Prayer in the Early Church,* 56.

massive role in spreading the word of God even today. The earliest churches are seen in the New Testament, especially in Acts. In Acts chapter two, the early church is seen as a dynamic and spiritual community that played a massive role in the growth of other churches and the faith of believers. Believers were committed to learning, and they were often taught by apostles who had the part of spreading the redemptive message of Jesus Christ after he ascended into heaven.[102] Early Christian communities would engage in fellowship that gave them a deep sense of community and unity. As in the Last Supper, majority of church communities participated in the breaking of the bread as a reference to the body and the blood of Jesus Christ during the crucifixion. Today, church communities still partake the Eucharist to commemorate the same.

In Acts 11:19-30 (NIV), the Antioch Church in the Book of acts is described. It is within this first church that the word Christian was first coined and used after that. The church in Antioch had a diverse congregation that included members from different communities, illustrating the call of disciples to spread the word to all the nations. Antioch is described as the missionary sending church in that there were apostles such as Paul and Barnaba, who were some of the earliest missionaries in the New Testament.[103] The apostles called upon individuals from various backgrounds to participate in the church communities and the missionary work that was carried out in Asia. Church communities have since evolved and changed drastically. Most churches now participate in global missions that are enabled by technology and globalization. Church communities

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[102] Duane L. Anderson, "The Development of the Early Church," Integrity, Integrity/deveachrhttps://serveandequip.org/Topical/dla_devearlychurch-t0-0095.pdf.

[103] Duane L. Anderson, "The Development of the Early Church," Integrity, Integrity/deveachrhttps://serveandequip.org/Topical/dla_devearlychurch-t0-0095.pdf.

today still participate in community outreaches where they demonstrate God's love through acts of service such as sharing with the less fortunate, feeding street children, and donating to the less fortunate. Church communities have not entirely come to an end with the onset of technology, although they have been reinforced with vital aspects of technology enabling missions and evangelism.

Discipleship

Discipleship is rooted in the New Testament biblical traditions. Jesus called upon twelve men and made them his disciples. The disciples of Jesus learned with him, and eventually, they were left behind to continue with the work of Jesus Christ. Discipleship involves nurturing and mentoring new believers in the Christian faith, which helps them grow both spiritually and in confidence. Discipleship fits into the classical modes of evangelism in that it is based on biblical teachings. Discipleship has a multiplicative effect where once a person is chosen as a disciple, they must teach other people, which was the central tenet of the Great Commission.[104] Discipleship involved teaching and training new believers in the fundamental doctrines of faith, and later, the disciples would be evangelists. In the modern day, discipleship is rare, although there is evangelism, which plays the same role.

Missions and Outreach

Missions and outreach are classical models of evangelism. The Apostle Paul in the early churches in the New Testament traveled far and wide to share the Gospel of the

[104] Boaheng, "Online Church “Community” and the Great Commission," 36.

Lord.[105] The Great Commission, as recorded in the Book of Matthew 28:18-20 (NIV), is also a call for carrying out the mission. Jesus disciples were told to go and make followers across the world, which meant that they had to travel and share the Gospel of the Lord with those who had not heard of it. The letters of Paul to the various churches in the New Testament are also seen as a mode of evangelism and missiology. Paul wrote letters that had theological teachings on how different churches were supposed to be run. While not traditionally seen as outreach, this has evolved today to direct evangelism, where Christians draw lessons from Paul's epistles to serve them today and their churches. The spread of Christianity from Jerusalem all the way to Rome, as documented in the Book of Acts, is also part of outreach.[106] Over the centuries, Christian missions have continued, and they are still relevant, especially with the advent of the internet, which made connections and communications globally easier.

Modern Methods of Carrying out Missions

Digital Evangelism

In the twenty first century, digital evangelism has become one of the most potent tools for spreading the message of Christianity. Digital evangelism is a fulfillment of the New Testament call for the Great Commission, which was a mandate given by Jesus Christ to his people to go and preach the gospel. The advent of the internet has enabled

[105] Duane L. Anderson, "The Development of the Early Church," Integrity, Integrity/deveachrhttps://serveandequip.org/Topical/dla_devearlychurch-t0-0095.pdf.

[106] Tae-Won Seo, "The Relevance of Paul's Missionary Methods to Today's Christian Mission," Repository, https://repository.cpu.edu.ph/handle/20.500.12852/2069.

globalization, which brought church communities together. Various modes of digital evangelism have been adopted over time, such as podcasting, websites, and blogs. These play a huge role in advancing missiology in this century as well as promoting accessibility to various people globally. A closer look into the part of the internet in digital evangelism involved focusing on the reliability of the means of evangelism.[107] Podcasts have grown in popularity since people are too busy to stop and watch something. Podcasts enable people to listen to content while they are on the move. Podcasts are easily accessible on various streaming platforms, and they can be listened to without causing inconveniences. They allow for engagement where people can participate in long-form discussions and profound theological testimonies that expand their understanding of the Bible.

Today, evangelists have podcasts that they occasionally post discussing crucial Christian information. Podcasts have shown a global missiological impact by facilitating cross-cultural and interfaith dialogues that allow Christians to engage.[108] Like podcasts, Christian websites play the same role in global outreach. Websites are a form of digital evangelism where churches create websites to serve as information hubs where they provide information such as sermons, Bible verses, and study material concerning Christianity. Websites are also accessible globally, and people are not limited to physical churches or missionaries. Most websites have interactive features where Christians get to ask questions and engage with fellow Christians from all walks of life.[109] Other than

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[107] Časni, "The Need and Possibility for Evangelizing Through the Internet," 99.

[108] Crumpton, "The Church has Left the Building," 13.

[109] Časni, "The Need and Possibility for Evangelizing Through the Internet," 96.

offering theological information, podcasts allow carrying out missiological training where people can learn how to be evangelists by just logging into a church website. Blogs like podcasts and websites play a significant role. Through blogs, Christians can express their thoughts on specific theological questions. The best thing about digital evangelism is that it promotes engagement on the internet, and it lets people interact with each other ideas while still spreading the word. The internet plays a huge role in digital evangelism and fulfilling the Great Commission. The internet offers accessibility to interactive communities and offers evangelists an opportunity to counteract misinformation, which would be impossible physically.

Live Streaming and Online Worship

Live streaming and online worship have become essential aspects of Christianity today. Live streaming aligns with the Christian role of missiology and evangelism, where Christians are called to fulfill the Great Commission. The internet also enables live streaming and online worship through the global outreach of evangelists to communities globally. With online worship, Christians archive live recordings. They listen to the recordings later and share them with others. This was not possible with the traditional modes of worship, where people attended the church and only took short notes.[110] Social media allows for engagement and interactions, making evangelism much easier. Live streaming enables real-time interaction where people can comment and react to information being shared live. Real-time interaction in the modern-day creates a sense of

[110] Crumpton, "The Church has Left the Building," 45.

community and allows people to get immediate responses to questions and prayer requests. Online worship services provide a wide range of resources.

Video Content

Video content platforms and apps have grown in popularity for the last couple of years. People are more active on social media in this era than they have been before. Such apps offer an opportunity for people to share information globally. The church takes advantage of such opportunities to participate in missiology and evangelism.[111] TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, and music platforms such as Spotify are great platforms to showcase theological information and carry on the role of the Great Commission. YouTube allows content creators to share videos with a worldwide audience. When church communities post theological information on YouTube, it can be accessed by millions of people. Besides sharing, YouTube offers users a chance to comment on the content, and the church leaders can engage with the online church communities that way. YouTube is a library of educational resources, including Bible studies, apologetics, and theological discussions. Such information promotes disciples and deepens believers' trust in their theological leaders through various interactions.

TikTok and Instagram allow people to create short-form videos with straightforward information. Most church communities use these apps to capture some of the most useful theological lessons and share them globally. The youth are active on these apps, and the younger demographic is reached through such apps. Music platforms offer music, which is a powerful tool in modern-day evangelism. Christian artist creates

[111] Časni, "The Need and Possibility for Evangelizing Through the Internet," 100.

evangelistic songs that convey Christian messages and that are shared globally.[112] All these platforms offer creative mechanisms for sharing evangelical messages, especially to young people who are constantly using such apps and media. People can scrutinize theological information on apps and engage with theological leaders to understand the word. By taking advantage of these digital platforms, individuals can effectively promote the Christian message.

Social Media Engagement

All the methods of evangelism discussed are, in one way or another, modes of social media engagement. Social media has become a powerful tool today in advancing missiology and evangelism as a means of aligning with the Great Commission's call to spread the Christian message to all nations.[113] Social media can reach diverse audiences through Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn apps. Content that is shared on these platforms comes from people of different cultures, languages, and geographical backgrounds. There are interfaith dialogues that are also held in the media. This way, Christians can relate their lessons to those of people of other faiths, creating a sense of respect for different cultures.

Real-time interaction on the internet gives a very high level of engagement and interactivity, which allows Christianity to participate in meaningful conversations. Social media allows for content sharing and amplification, where users can easily share Christian messages such as sermons, testimonies, and other social networks. Social media

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[112] Časni, "The Need and Possibility for Evangelizing Through the Internet," 96.

[113] Boaheng, “Online Church “Community” and the Great Commission,” 33.

content can go viral, which means a single notification can reach almost everyone who is logged into a specific app. The internet has made it very easy for people to engage in missiology and evangelism; after the onset of COVID-19, most churches ended up setting up online churches, and it has remained like that for most of them.[114] By leveraging social media, individuals and organizations can effectively share the Christian message and contribute towards Jesus' work of evangelism.

Challenges Experienced with Modern Evangelism

Secular and Hostile Space

The advancement of technology and the advent of the internet have changed the way missiology and evangelism are carried out within the Christian community. The internet offers a global platform for Christians to spread the word and connect with other Christians of different backgrounds. These developments are challenging in that they bring out a couple of issues that need to be resolved. Theologians need to be aware of the online space and the challenges that it is most likely to present to the Christian communities based online. One of the significant challenges presented is that the internet is a secular space that is usually hostile from time to time.[115] People of diverse communities who have different beliefs and perspectives towards Christianity are present online and are entitled to opinions.

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[114] Andres Bryson and Davies, "COVID-19, Virtual Church Services and a New Temporary Geography of Home," *Wiley Online Library* 111, no. 3 (2020): 360-372.

[115] A. Skevington Wood, "Contemporary Religious Trends: Modern Methods of Evangelism," *The Expository Times* 67, no. 2 (1955): 37-41.

While the internet provides an excellent opportunity to connect and engage with a vast audience, it is also a breeding ground for hate and hostility. Within the platforms are atheists, agnostics, and other people of different faiths. Such people present a dilemma for theologians in that we are all called to share trust, love, and respect, as declared in 1 Peter 3:15 (NIV). In trying to resolve this issue, Christian evangelists need to draw theological resources that show how important it is to be humble and patient with a learning community. The theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer emphasizes the importance of offering people grace when they are hostile during the process of sharing the word of God.[116] Christians are expected to uphold their beliefs when interacting with negative people online. At the same time, theologians need to teach their online church communities to know when to draw boundaries. Intense interactions could lead to people questioning their faith in being victims of cyberbullying, which could affect their mental health negatively.

Theological Inaccuracy

The internet is filled with information of all kinds. Still, it is often filled with theologically inaccurate information or information overload that needs to be clarified or more apparent to the online Christian communities. This challenge arises from the vast collections and volumes of content that are available online, from theological insights to shallow and misleading interpretations of Christian teachings and doctrines. Christian missiologists and evangelists need to help their communities and churches how to

[116] David P. Gushee, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Evangelical Moment in American Public Life," *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 2, no. 1 (2007): 14.

navigate the vast sea of information with discernment.[117] Discernment is the ability to tell the right from the wrong. Theological accuracy is essential since conveying wrong or incomplete information can only lead to negative results.

Theological resources from the internet, such as research and academic papers, often have a formation that can help guide Christians on knowing right from wrong. While most Christians may not be interested in reading such articles, theologians must educate their audiences and protect them when deemed necessary.[118] Individuals must engage in online evangelism to ground themselves with the right and sound theological foundations. Karl Barth, a theological scholar, emphasized the importance of having a much deeper engagement with the scripture and the traditions of the Christian church and community to avoid theological inaccuracies.[119] By having a solid foundation in faith and biblical information, Christians are most likely to bypass the inaccuracies encountered on the internet.

Online Skeptics

A significant challenge with online missiology and evangelism is the skepticism that surrounds the internet. Often, Christians and other people on the internet are worried about their privacy and how it would affect them if they shared, say, sensitive Christian teachings on the internet.[30] A great example is sharing information about homosexuality.

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[117] Oren Golan and Michele Martini, "Religious Live-Streaming: Constructing the Authentic in Real Time," *Information, Communication and Society* 22, no. 3 (2019): 444.

[118] Golan and Martini, "Religious Live-Streaming," 56.

[119] Bruce L. McCormack and Clifford B. Anderson, eds., *Karl Barth and American Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2011), 56.

Modernity has frequently promoted diversity, even in terms of gender. According to the biblical teachings, it is a sin to engage in homosexuality, and sharing such information online would cause hate and uproar from the queer community. The internet thrives from such debates, and at the end of the day, the party that loses ends up having severely questionable beliefs about its teachings.

Christians who participate in online outreach, including theologians, need to grapple with such issues in a theologically informed way. Theologians like Reinhold Niebuhr explore the concept of Christian ethics in a much evolved and complex world.[31] They give Christians a framework for understanding and responding to ethical dilemmas in a digital context. Theological discussions about human dignity are also meaningful when addressing issues related to respecting another person's privacy in the new worldview. In a digital world, personal information is passed around quickly, and Christians need to advocate for ethical ways of sharing Christian teachings and doctrines which does not involve breaking people's privacy. Engaging with theological perspectives on these issues can guide Christians to develop ethical and respectful online practices.

Minimal Attention Span

The attention span of online audiences cannot be fully acknowledged since people have different attention spans. This presents a challenge in how many people listen or read through the information that is shared online. Numerous distractions on the internet are one click away. There is competing content that people would rather click on than

[30] Joni Manumpak, Parulian Gultom, Fransiskus Irwan Widjaja, Martina Novalina, Ester Lina Situmorang, and Yohana Natassha, "Pastoral Strategy in Developing the Dimension of Understanding Generation Z," *Evangelical* 6 (2022): 50.

[31] Edward J. Carnell, *The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2007), 74.

watch a whole sermon on the internet.[120] Maintaining the interest of the viewers is one of the most essential things that theologians of the modern age need to consider. Fun and creative ways to share Christian messages are an excellent place to start.

The challenge is, however, amplified by the fact that the internet, by nature, is fast paced; and therefore, information is consumed and forgotten rapidly. Christian evangelists need to turn to theological insights for guidance on how to address this challenge. Theological discussions on the importance of storytelling and narratives can be valuable to evangelists.[121] From the historical times in the Bible, storytelling was a viable way of keeping the Christian messages feasible and relevant. Jesus Christ used parables to teach his disciples and followers. Utilizing such a compelling mechanism of communication and engagement can captivate the online audience and sustain their interest for the long term.

Resolving Challenges Presented by Modern Missiology

Accuracy in Training

Challenges that face evangelism in the modern era keep evolving, and with the onset of the internet, they have taken a new dimension. Ensuring that the information

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[120] Gultom, Parulian, Widjaja, Novalina, Situmorang, and Natassha, "Pastoral Strategy in Developing the Dimension of Understanding Generation Z," 53.

[121] Gultom, Parulian, Widjaja, Novalina, Situmorang, and Natassha, "Pastoral Strategy in Developing the Dimension of Understanding Generation Z," 53.

being obtained is accurate is essential. The competence of those sharing the information, such as evangelists and ministers, needs to be paramount as well. Accuracy in training emerges as a critical mode of resolving some of the challenges presented above.

Evangelism is a double-edged sword in the modern era; on one side, it helps to promote the word of God and fulfill the Great Commission, while on the other hand, it has the potential to cause misinformation, misinterpreting, and distortion of Christian messages. Nurturing informed ministers and evangelists is crucial. Theological education should include the importance of sharing accurate information online.[122] This requires rigorous engagements with academic sources and articles that give the correct information to Christians online. Theological seminaries and online courses also help evangelists understand the institutions of sharing accurate information online. While preaching in the church may sound like presenting information online to an audience, the two are different. The internet has people from all walks of life who are likely to use the messages differently. Evangelists should consider tailoring messages in such a way that they are informative to all audiences and their interpretation is in line with the Christian doctrines. Accuracy in the delivery of Christian information also involves the cultivation of critical thinking skills. In an age of misinformation, evangelists should have the ability to discern suitable sources from the wrong ones.

[122] Lori L. Fazzino, "Leaving the Church Behind: Applying a Deconversion Perspective to Evangelical Exit Narratives," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 29, no. 2 (2014): 246.

Engagement with Skeptics

The internet has readily accessible and diverse information. Engagement with skeptics is unavoidable. Skeptics are often armed with doubts and now critics and have found an amplified voice online, making constructive dialogues more imperative. For theologians who engage with skeptics, they must create an open and respectful space for discourse. Such an approach is rooted in the belief that meaningful conversations can help to bridge the gap between opposing viewpoints and promote a deeper understanding of faith.[123] To engage with skeptics effectively, evangelists need to dwell upon the Bible and other Christian teachings. Constructive dialogues with skeptics can cause favorable outcomes. While converting people to Christianity may not always be the goal of engaging with skeptics, it can often cause a deeper understanding of Christianity and drive conversion to Christianity. The engagement not only offers biblical foundations and teachings, but it helps to bridge the gap between individuals of different worldviews and faiths, hence increasing the shared commitment to understanding Christianity as declared in the Great Commission.[124]

Quality Content

Most people on the internet are drawn to materials that are well-organized and easy to understand. Engaging with quality content that is straight to the point is much easier than engaging with bulky content. The internet is also flooded with numerous materials and distinguishing between quality is a challenge presented in modern

[123] Young, *Reading and Praying Online*, 104.

[124] Boaheng, "Online Church "Community," 33.

evangelism. Evangelists and ministers are expected to strive to create well-researched and straight-to-the-point materials that reflect the depth of their faith.[125] On the flip side, lowquality content could be more appealing, and people will often scroll away. Churches must invest in equipment to print their material online for proper engagement with online communities and churches. Content that reflects depth and richness is also appealing to audiences online.

Some people are online with the aim of educating themselves, and others with the objective of entertaining themselves. Striking the balance to meet the needs of all the parties online is essential. Quality content is expected to convey profound spiritual insight, ethical teachings, and historical legacies that make faith relevant to the followers. Quality content in the modern world is expected to be relevant to contemporary issues.[126] As discussed earlier, the world is becoming more open-minded, and people are open to ideas of homosexuality and queerness. Addressing such matters with sensitivity and appreciating the current, social, ethical, and moral issues demonstrates faith in guidance and mindfulness amidst a chaotic world and generation.[127] Quality content is more than just throwing information online. Instead, it is ensuring that the religious messages are articles and that they create a space for meaningful dialogue, education, and inspiration.

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[125] Tim Hutchings, "Contemporary Religious Community and the Online Church," *Information, Communication and Society* 14, no. 8 (2011): 1130.

[126] Hutchings, "Contemporary Religious Community and the Online Church," 1121.

[127] Jack Barentsen, "Church Leadership as Adaptive Identity Construction in a Changing Social Context," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 15, no. 2 (2015): 49-80.

Adaptation and Innovation

The evolving nature of the internet means that it is constantly presenting new opportunities as well as new challenges. To effectively navigate online evangelism in the modern era, evangelists have the mandate to embrace adaptation and innovation within the shifting landscape.[128] The internet is constantly leading to technological advancement. Evangelists need to be vigilant in keeping their pace with the changing times.[129] This may look like staying informed on the current social media trends and hashtags and engaging with communities online with the different communication tools offered. The way people consume information online also evolves.

People are more likely to listen to podcasts than watch YouTube videos. On the same note, short-form videos on TikTok are more likely to be reasonable than long videos that consume time. Learning such advancements is essential to keep up with the changing internet landscape. Adapting to cultural trends is also a considerable way of embracing innovation and adapting to the changing times.[130] Evangelists are expected to remain attuned to the shifts and change their strategies accordingly. This may include addressing contemporary issues, as mentioned earlier, and participating in sensitive conversations while offering their two cents from a Christian or theological perspective.

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[128] David R. Dunaetz, "Innovation in Churches: A Theoretical Framework." *Great Commission Research Journal* 13, no. 2 (2021): 17.

[129] Barentsen, "Church Leadership as Adaptive Identity Construction," 49-80.

[130] Barentsen, "Church Leadership as Adaptive Identity Construction," 49-80.

Conclusion

Changing with the times is essential in maintaining the relevance of evangelism and abiding by the command of the Great Commission of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. The Great Commission as in Matthew 28:16-20 is a directive for all Christians to spread the word to all nations, embracing the recent times and adapting to the new era of modern worship aligns with the role of the Great Commission.

Contemporary worship, as discussed, already presents a lot of challenges. Resolving such challenges is essential in enabling theological accuracy engagement and promoting cultural sensitivity while at it. The internet can reach a global audience. Theologians and church leaders can take advantage of the internet to go beyond their local communities and reach a global audience. Transcending geographical and physical audiences is a way of fulfilling the Great Commission's call to make disciples of all nations. Besides getting a global audience, the internet can promote accessibility and inclusivity. People who live in remote areas and have access to the internet can break such barriers by attending churches online, where they feel like they belong to a community.

The Great Commission in the New Testament not only successes evangelism but also discipleship to others. In the passage, Jesus instructs the disciples, saying:

> Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth had been given to me, therefore go and make disciples out of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and the holy spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you, and surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:16-20).

The passage emphasizes sharing the gospel and inviting other people, despite their backgrounds, to become followers of Christ and form personal spiritual relationships with him. Online platforms enable theologians to teach, provide Bible studies and other resources that individuals may access, hence promoting discipleship. Over the past couple of years, especially during the COVID-19 era, most churches had the willingness to engage online churches. Most churches have formed formidable relationships, showing the church's engagement in adopting contemporary and modern means of communication and technology.

While traditional churches involved attending churches physically, the online space has enabled more flexibility in worship and ministry. The church is now able to reach a larger audience at any time and place without being restricted physically. Further, online Christian platforms have caused the multiplication of ministry where a single piece of sermon must influence a massive group of people. Some people end up creating praise and worship music out of a trending work of worship, ultimately aligning with the Great Commission's goal of discipleship and evangelism. The growth and development of the internet can be seen as an advantage for the church, and it continuously proves that the church is constantly willing to speak the language of everyone’s culture, making sure that biblical message is relevant to everyone. Adapting to the new ways of worship is necessary for the church; it aligns with the Great Commission's statement to teach, make disciples and engage with people of different cultures.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

The interdisciplinary chapter will explore the internet's impact on many levels of the Christian community. The internet has impacted how church communities carry out their activities today and how missions are carried out, and the evangelical role has also changed significantly. Drawing from former research topics of biblical, historical, and theological foundation chapters, this research seeks to shed more light on the everchanging relationship between the digital era and Christian religious practices. The research aims to establish a critical link between communication and theology by showing communication's role as a driving force for theological expression and transformation within religious contexts. The digital era has seen a change in missions, church communities, and evangelism, and by exploring in what depth communication plays a part and using real-time examples, we will be able to come up with a conclusion on whether digital communication has revolutionized theology.

We will be investigating both the positive and the negative by looking out for the possible opportunities that communication offers to theology and the challenges that come in hand. The central tenet of the study lies in exploring the interplay between theology and communication. The research will unveil quite a dynamic and nuanced relationship between the foundational elements of faith and the digital tools that have been used. As part of the study, we will focus on the ethical implications that emerge in

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the discussion between theology and digital communication as a fresh perspective. This chapter is not only meant to contribute to the scholarly understanding of the interplay between theology and communication. Instead, it provides practical insights that theologians, scholars, and other practitioners can apply to navigate religion in the digital age. The study also aims to investigate the importance of bridging the gap between theology and communication in a world profoundly shaped by the constant evolution of the internet.

Introduction

The development of the internet ushered in an era that no one was prepared for. The results that have been made in various industries since the advent of the internet have been skyrocketing and unparalleled. In the digital age, where there is so much information accessible anywhere, global connectivity, and interactivity, the interplay between religion and technology is undeniably an area to focus on. Within the transformational context, this research is meant to explore the impact of the internet on theology, mission, and church communities. The significance of this study is that it acknowledges the changing religious landscape due to the development of the internet. As the internet takes over the world's communication, it also extends to faith and spirituality. For a theologian, the internet has become a tool and a challenge that offers many possibilities for spreading the word, fostering Christian communities online, and engaging in evangelistic endeavors while raising critical questions in theology and faith practice.

From the former research chapters, we discussed the advent of the internet by tracing the history behind the development of the intent. This was then tied to how fast

the internet revolutionized how religious information was shared online. In 2019, the world was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, which also played a part in using the internet as a tool for evangelism when the whole world was on lockdown. Since then, the internet has been a great tool in carrying out weekly church services that people can attend in their homes. Another research focused on the theological theme of missionary and evangelism. Information on the advent of the internet was again used to reinforce our research. The study is mainly founded on the internet's role in carrying out missions in the modern age. The chapter analyzed the classical means of missiology and investigated the contemporary standards of missiology and the role the intern has played in promoting the latter.

This research chapter aims to offer a comprehensive analysis of the ways through which the internet has reshaped religious practices and theological thinking. Its scope will thoroughly examine the transformation of traditional missions, the dynamics of contemporary church communities, the evolving evangelism strategies, and how digital communication affects or promotes all these factors. The main intention is to guide theologians in the new era and develop practical insights within religious communities that are relevant in spreading the word.

Purpose of the Research

The primary purpose is two-fold. First, to provide an interplay of theology and modern communication; and second, to provide an understanding of how digital communication shapes and is shaped by theological and religious practices, contributing to the theological knowledge of Christians, scholars, theologians, researchers, and religious leaders.

The research objectives are many. We are analyzing how communication relates to theology and missiology. We are determining how the internet has impacted the theological foundations of faith in the digital age. The research will explore ways in which communications within the church have shifted and the positive and negative implications of the changes. We will analyze the interplay between communication and theology under the influence of the internet on religious practices. The goal is to develop new insights from the interdisciplinary study. It is important to determine how the insights can be applied in the real world. Finally, we are exploring the ethical implications of digital communication in a religious setting.

Research Questions

The questions that the research will seek to answer are stated below to address the above objectives. The questions are based on the former foundation's chapter on the Bible, history, and theology, and they are meant to inform into the interplay between theology and digital communication.

1. How has the Internet played a part in interpreting and applying theological principles in contemporary religious contexts?
2. What fundamental changes does the Internet bring in missiology, evangelism, and the traditional church setting?
3. How do the church communities navigate the ethical and theological considerations that arise from integrating digital communication and theological practices?

Communication in Religious Practices

Information and communication are dramatically changing the world that we exist in. Sometimes, communication meant to bring people together tends to reinforce divisions, widen the gaps between the privileged and the underprivileged, and cause oppression while distorting the order of the systems we previously used. Digital communication has affected the church as well. Pre-COVID-19, most churches still had the traditional setup. After the pandemic, people would no longer turn up in the same numbers since they discovered that there is a much more reliable form of worship, which is online worship. Communication is a great gift to humanity by God.[131] From a Christian perspective, Jesus announced the coming of God's kingdom and commissioned us to proclaim the good news to all the people until the end of time. This is referred to the Bible in the New Testament as the Great Commission in the Book of Matthew. Christians are also promised the power of the Holy Spirit that is met to change the Babel of confusion as described during the Pentecost. Mass media suffers the challenge of creating an illusion of a community while, in essence, the actual communities are disintegrated. Alternative media and mass media, rather than bringing people together, isolate, and divide people.

Christians, however, cannot ignore that the internet is positively impactful, and these online church communities can be made impactful. Most churches have options as to whether to attend physical churches; if that is impossible, members of the churches can stream such services online in real-time. Digital communication enables religious

[131] Thierry-Marie Courau, Stefanie Knauss, and Enrico Galavotti, "The Church of the Future," *Concilium* (2018), 4, https://concilium.hymnsam.co.uk/media/1061/pages-from-concilium2018_4_editorial.pdf.

education and knowledge to be more accessible.[132] The internet overflows with religious encyclopedias, theological studies, and educational across. While digital communication in spiritual practices is not without ethical capacities, navigating such ethical concerns requires scrutiny and adherence to principles that uphold the core values of faith.

The church's interest in using the tenets for communication is longstanding in social communication. Social media is a historical process that is manifesting its effects right now. The church has also had a fundamentally positive approach to social media and its ability to transform and reach more people. According to Pope Pius XII's 1957 encyclical letter, the Pope underlines that, "The Church sees these media as 'gifts of God."[133] As the church tries to understand digital communication, the history of human communication sometimes evolves from the pride-driven project of Babel to the modern days where everything is a touch of a button away. Reconciling digital communication to the call by God to be commissioners of the word of God is imminent as it taints communication to contribute greatly to the enlargement and enrichment of men's minds and the propagation and consolidation of the kingdom of God. Three decades ago, the Communio et Proressio noted clearly that "modern media offer new ways of confronting

people with the message of the Gospel."[134] God, therefore, continues to communicate with human beings through the church; however, shape and form it takes. If the Bible's teachings are authentically and correctly interesting, online church communities are as

[132] Courau, Knauss, and Galavotti, "The Church of the Future," 4.

[133] Kristina Drumheller and Matthew Drumheller, "Ideological Issues in Pope John Paul II's Messages on World Communications Day," *The Rhetoric of Pope John Paul II* 11 (2009): 173.

[134] Drumheller and Drumheller, "Ideological Issues in Pope John Paul II's Messages," 173.

much a mirror for the communion of trinity as the traditional church communities.[135] The internet does offer unique opportunities for proclaiming the saving truth of Jesus Christ on a global platform. Such audiences were beyond the church's wildest imaginations a couple of decades ago. Therefore, taking the opportunity and running with it is essential in enhancing Christian communication in a new age.

While we acknowledge the opportunities that the internet provides for online worship, it is essential to highlight the challenges of digital communication in the church communities on a deeper level. The word media can seem indifferent and even a hostile space of Christians' faith and morality.[136] Media culture is so deeply imbued with a typically postmark sense that the absolute truth is lost within the overwhelming space. Some sites are solely created to defame church communities, which even constitutes violence to religious groups, leading to uproars that manifest in the real world as religious wars that a single comment could have started. Specific internet uses for spiritual communication require a lot of reflection by religious leaders and Christians as we all navigate these new waters.[137] The versatile reality of cyberspace can have problematic

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implications for religion and other areas of life. Virtual reality sometimes does not substitute for the real-life experience Christians get in church as it ignores some aspects such as sharing communion, social interaction, and community development. Pastoral planning is expected to consider how to lead people within the new territory so that

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[135] Drumheller and Drumheller, "Ideological Issues in Pope John Paul II's Messages," 173.

[136] Willem H. Oliver, "From In-Person to Online Worship," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 43, no. 1 (2022): 2404.

[137] Susan M. Camille, "Digital Ministry and Leadership in Today's Church," *The Catholic Library World* 93, no. 3 (2023): 193-193, https://www.proquest.com/openview/d4eb291efc8fcf277 1f1ef3489fb5aa5/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=2030996.

Christians feel space interacting with others online and sharing the word without much negativity.

Biblical Foundations and Communication

The Biblical Foundation Chapter explores how much online communities switched to online communities after the global pandemic. Post-pandemic, most of these churches did not get the same turnout as they had pre-pandemic. Christians realized that the internet could broadcast such services online, and they did not have to go to church.[138] This enables researchers to pose and consider whether they should move forward with the new changes or go back and refine the traditional models of worship. Hybrid models of worship are a relatively new concept.[139] The hybrid model of prayer is the answer to the glaring problem of creating a connected community post-pandemic.[140] The chapter explores the message of the centurion servant in Matthew 8:8, which states, "The centurion replied, 'Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But say the word and my servant will be healed." The understanding of the centurion gave an

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inevitable shift that led those who had not begun following Jesus to gasp and question everything.[141]

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[138] Young, “Reading and Praying Online,” 93-106.

[139] Courau, Knauss, and Galavotti, "The Church of the Future," 4.

[140] Anita L. Cloete, “Living in a Digital Culture: The Need for Theological Reflection,” *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 71, no. 2 (2015): https://www.ajol.info/index.php/hts/article/view/113551.

[141] Crawford, *The Faithful Centurion*, 44.

Jesus was amazed at the centurion's faith, and the centurion saw Jesus as being so powerful that Jesus' word could carry the same power as His presence and touch.[142] Putting in the same faith in gearing the modern forms of worship is necessary as it enables Christians to believe in the presence of God wherever they are. It prevents the notion that Jesus and God are only confined to the church's walls. The story of the sick servant in the Bible fears a whole direct perspective. A sick servant beloved by his master suffered an illness of paralysis, and his servant knew that God would heal him. The slave depicts many who need the touch of the Savior.[143] The church today feels the need for a powerful way to broadcast the message of God. Christians, however, need to rid their minds of the mental boundaries that harbor the limiting beliefs that insinuate that there are things God cannot do when we are not physically together. Reconciling that the person of the Lord Jesus is fully backed by His word helps Christians to embrace the idea that we can expect the fullness of the Lord through his word regardless of where it is preached. Jesus did not just preach in synagogues but would go outside in the streets, healing, preaching, and teaching the word of God.[144] This idea enabled modern Christians to embrace the changes already being felt. In as much as a hybrid model is needed, the

online model of worship needs to be adopted first as a fuel likely to impact people positively, regardless of its numerous shortcomings.

[142] Crawford, *The Faithful Centurion*, 46.

[143] Crawford, *The Faithful Centurion*, 41.

[144] Lori L. Fazzino, "Leaving the Church Behind: Applying a Deconversion Perspective to Evangelical Exit Narratives," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 29, no. 2 (2014): 249-266.

Historical Foundations and Communication

The Historical Foundation Chapter traces the internet's evolution and concurrently links that to how communication has shifted in Christian community outreach. The internet has changed the way people communicate and interact with each other by offering options, making the world small every waking day. Online Bibles, religious writings, and readings from any era are now available online with the click of a button. People worldwide may communicate with each other and share religious convictions and practices regardless of their geographical area. The internet was fully embraced in the Christian communities at the onset of the 2019 COVID-19 global pandemic.[145] People had no choice but to go into mandatory lockdown.

Many churches and houses of worship were shut down, and physical places of worship relocated their services online. The proliferation of accessible online materials has allowed religious groups to assist their members in their spiritual development via the internet. The internet has revolutionized people's ability to share and acquire information online.[146] It has revolutionized human interaction by making worldwide connections as simple as looking at the phone. Technological advancements have profoundly influenced worship in religious communities. Social media enables religious institutions to have a

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wide range of options for interacting with Christians, spreading the word of God, and participating in online services.

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[145] Cloete, "Living in a Digital Culture: The Need for Theological Reflection."

[146] Andrew Village and Leslie J. Francis, "Lockdown Worship in the Church of England: Predicting Affect Responses to Leading or Accessing Online and In-Church Services," *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 44, no. 2 (2023): 280-296.

The research explores the blending of worship that combines the online churches and physical churches. The blended forms of prayer are a much more adaptable and inclusive approach, and it aligned with the ethical concerns of sharing religious information online. The internet is, however, crucial in the growth of the hybrid worship paradigm in that it provides resources for developing innovative and interactive services. The internet also offers new worship styles and incorporates multimedia into its services.[147] Multimedia features like movies, music, and other visual presentations enrich and enliven the worship experience for online Christian communities. These discoveries on the internet contribute value to the doctoral ministry in several ways. The historical underpinnings of the internet and its influence on religious practices inform Christians on how to use the internet best. Online Christian communication platforms and online forums have the potential to facilitate connectivity and engagement among members, thereby promoting a sense of community and belonging that transcends the geographical confines of the church.

Theological Foundations and Communication

The former Theological Foundation Chapter explored a theological theme within the Christian faith and how the internet age has impacted it. The research delves into modern Christians' role in fulfilling Jesus' command of the Great Commission as seen in the Gospel Book of Matthew in the New Testament. The research compares the classical

methods of evangelism and how they were relevant to the Great Commission and modern means of evangelism in the dawn of the internet. The chapter explores the theological

[147] Cloete, "Living in a Digital Culture: The Need for Theological Reflection."

theme of missiology and evangelism. The landscape of Christian missions and evangelism changes now and then. In this century, it is significantly impacted by the dawn of the internet. While such developments offer many opportunities for communication and outreach, they also tend to present challenges and questions for the practice of missiology. The internet enables communication through social media platforms. The internet provides unprecedented information and a global outreach platform, enhancing communication. Concerning the theological theme, missiology, and evangelism, the internet has dramatically promoted missiology. The internet has enabled most churches to schedule services, support groups, and other online Christian materials accessible at any time and place. Social media has also given religious institutions a more comprehensive range of options for communicating with their followers, spreading the word, and even holding online worship services.

Mission and evangelism are the core methods of the spreading the word. Evangelism ensures that the proper religious message is shared with people, avoiding misleading information. The Great Commission in the Book of Matthew is an excellent part of the research. The research seeks to tie the two together where modern Christians fulfill the call by Jesus Christ to spread the word worldwide. Jesus Christ gives instructions to his disciples involving the spreading of his teachings. This becomes the first point in the Bible where evangelism is declared and carried on over the years. The Great Commission is still an ongoing responsibility for Christians today, shaping Christian's missiology and evangelism. Digital communication in the twenty first century is a great evangelical tool. Digital evangelism fulfills the New Testament call in the Great Commission by Jesus Christ. Various modes of digital evangelism have been adopted over time, such as podcasting, websites, and blogs. These play a huge role in advancing missiology in this century while promoting accessibility to various people globally. As

mentioned earlier, there is a very delicate interplay of religion and digital communication. The internet is a great opportunity, but at the same time, there is access to a lot of information that can sometimes confuse Christians, especially if religious leaders are not there to guide online Christian communities.[148] Some challenges experienced with modern evangelism include secular and hostile online people who might create a breeding ground for hate and hostility.

Within the internet, Christians engage with atheists, agnostics, and other people of different faiths who have the right to share their opinions as much as they may be different from those of Christians. The internet could also suffer theological inaccuracy.[149] There is information overload, which is too much for people to process; therefore, it needs to be more accurate and accurate. Resolving such challenges would offer a much better space to spread the word. There are ways to resolve the challenges, such as providing training for religious leaders, engaging positively with skeptics, and posting only quality Christian content on the internet that is digestible by any audience. Changing with the times is essential for maintaining the relevance of evangelism and abiding by the command of the Great Commission of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. The internet

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offers a great challenge of communication. While traditional churches involved attending churches physically, the online space has enabled more flexibility in worship and ministry. The church can now target a larger audience at any time and place without being

[148] Susan M. Camille, "Digital Ministry and Leadership in Today's Church," *The Catholic Library World* 93, no. 3 (2023): 193, https://www.proquest.com/openview/d4eb291efc8fcf2771f1ef3489fb5aa5/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=2030996.

[149] The Relevant Staff, "Three Times Jesus Healed Without Touching," Relevant Magazine, https://relevantmagazine.com/faith/three-times-jesus-healed-without-touching.

restricted physically. Further, online Christian platforms have caused the multiplication of ministry where a single piece of sermon must influence a massive group of people.

Interdisciplinary Insights in Theology

Digital communication has created a transformative era where information is easily accessible and flows easily and at an unprecedented speed. The technological revolution extends its influence across many aspects of human life, such as religion. The interdisciplinary relationship between Christianity and digital communication has opened new horizons for the theological discourse, offering fresh insights and challenges for religious thought in the internet era. Digital communication facilitates the spread of spiritual teachings and sparks a reevaluation of theological concepts, community building, and spiritual practices.

The internet enables the quick dissemination of religious teachings to a global audience. With its reach tradition, Christianity has embraced digital communication to reach people in different geographical, cultural, and linguistic boundaries. Churches, ministries, and religious organizations now maintain an extensive online presence, streaming sermons, posting articles, and sharing multimedia content.[150] The digital platform has transformed the traditional pulpit into an expansive virtual space where sermons are delivered through live streams and other video platforms.[151] This accessibility allows not only the devout but also those curious about Christianity to

[150] Heidi Campbell, "Making Space for Religion in Internet Studies," *The Information Society* 21, no. 4 (2005): 309-315, https://doi.org/10.1080/01972240591007625.

[151] Oren Golan and Michele Martini, “Religious Live-Streaming: Constructing the Authentic in Real,” *Information, Communication and Society* 22, no. 3 (2019): 437-454.

engage with religious teachings. This interdisciplinary relationship between Christianity and digital communication has expanded the outreach of theological content.

Theology is defined as the study of the divine and religious experience, and it has been deeply impacted by the onset of digital communication in the twenty first century. The internet has theologians and religious researchers as a global forum to engage with each other in conversations related to the Christian faith and spirituality. Theologians can now share their interpretations with a diverse pool of fellow theologians. Interdisciplinary dialogue is enriched through digital platforms, where theologians can engage in interfaith discussions, exploring common ground and differences. This has promoted a greater understanding of diverse religious traditions and led to a more inclusive approach to theological discourse. Moreover, many sacred texts and resources online are available as accumulated theological research and scholarships. Theological libraries and archives are now digitized and readily accessible, streamlining the research process. The digital age has also seen the emergence of online communities that enable scholars to collaborate, share resources, and engage in lively debates.[152]

Digital communication has facilitated the creation of virtual religious communities that transcend geographical limitations. Congregants can connect, worship, and share their faith online. Social media platforms, forums, and online groups have become hubs for religious discussions, support networks, and community building.

Specifically, Christianity has leveraged digital communication for congregational activities, including prayer meetings, Bible studies, and other forms of religious counseling. Virtual communities offer solace during times of need, which brings comfort

[152] Campbell, "Making Space for Religion in Internet Studies," 309-315.

to the faithful and fosters a sense of belonging. The internet era has ushered in a new form of ecclesiology, where the church exists physically and virtually.[153] Challenges and ethical considerations are posed while there are immense benefits from the interdisciplinary relationship between Christianity and digital communication. The digital space is not immune to misinformation and spreading wrong information.[154] Religious information is sensitive and reaches many people; therefore, misinformation could mislead many people. Questions about the authenticity of religious texts online often arise, and consequently, it is essential to embark on ethical considerations as spiritual leaders. The internet era has promoted and reimagined theology and spiritual practices within the Christian community. It has brought theology to a global platform, promoting intense dialogue, and understanding of Christianity across different communities, faiths, and cultures.

How the Research Shapes Understanding

The interplay of theological themes such as missiology and evangelism with communication dynamics and the digital age has significantly transformed how communication is understood within the Christian religion. This synergy of theology and technology has expanded the reach of Christian messaging and introduced new

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theological challenges and ethical considerations. Research in missiology, evangelism, communication, and the digital age reshapes the comprehension of communication in the

[153] Heidi A. Campbell and Michael W. DeLashmutt, “Studying Technology and Ecclesiology in Online Multi-Site Worship,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 29, no. 2 (May 1, 2014): 267–285.

[154] Campbell, "Making Space for Religion in Internet Studies,” 315.

context of the Christian religion.[155] As the study of missionary work, missiology has been profoundly impacted by the digital era. Traditionally, missionary efforts involved physical journeys to remote locations to share the Christian message. The digital age has broadened the horizons of missiology by allowing for virtual missionary work. Research in these areas reveals that digital communication tools have become essential in breaking geographical gaps, enabling missionaries to connect with distant communities and cultures. Preachers now use online platforms, social media, and video conferencing to share their faith, engage in cross-cultural dialogues, and create digital communities of believers.[156] The shift in missiological strategies has expanded the scope of Christian outreach in unprecedented ways, emphasizing the transformative role of digital communication in sharing the gospel.

Digital evangelism is no longer limited to street preaching or one-on-one interactions. The internet provides a vast and diverse audience for evangelism to reach. Research has explored how the digital age enables evangelists to adapt their message to different cultural contests, respond to questions and objections in real-time, and engage in interactive dialogues with non-believers. Online tools like blogs, podcasts, and video channels allow evangelists to convey Christian teachings creatively and effectively. Consequently, the research in evangelism demonstrates that the digital age has expanded

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the channels and methodologies of Christian communication.[157] The interdisciplinary relationship between communication and theology in the digital age promotes theological

[155] Campbell and DeLashmutt, "Studying Technology and Ecclesiology," 267–285.

[156] Philip R. Meadows, "Mission and Discipleship in a Digital Culture," *Mission Studies* 29, no. 2 (2012): 163-182.

[157] Campbell, "Making Space for Religion in Internet Studies," 309-315.

reflections on how faith and digital communication intersect. Theological research delves into online engagement's theological and moral dimensions within a Christian context. The study considers how digital communication aligns with or challenges theological principles—questions about love, forgiveness, and social justice in the digital realm. Scholars explore how online interactions can foster a sense of Christian community and unity, drawing from theological concepts of fellowship and communion. Such reflections also guide discussions on the theological implications of digital communications, which offer insights into how Christians can engage online while remaining faithful to their beliefs.

Ethical Considerations and Implications

Integrating the internet into our day-to-day activities has made life easier and transformed human interactions on many levels. As a medium for communication in religious practices, the internet has become a considerable factor in the digital age. However, beneath the surface of this digital communication lies several ethical considerations and implications when confirming the preservation of the integrity of faith, safeguarding personal privacy, and ensuring inclusivity and tolerance within online Christian spaces. Understanding the issues of ethical implications enables online Christian communities to address matters such as inclusivity and diversity while attempting to maintain the Christian faith. Decision-making in Christian religious

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practices in the digital age is essential to deal with the challenges that arise and accept the presented opportunities. At the same time, Christians navigate the ever-changing

landscape of the online faith and an ethically grounded digital spiritual and religious experience.

Access and inclusivity are some of the ethical considerations under scrutiny while we examine how internet use for Christian religious practices can be made more accessible. The internet can bring all the geographical and physical barriers that enable individuals to access online Christian resources such as teachings, sermons, videos, and music with online communities. This expansion of access to almost everything is ethically significant as it provides spiritual guidance to isolated people due to geographical limitations. It also allows access to information to people in remote areas, who can access the internet, connecting global communities to engage in meaningful Christian religious practices.[158] Access to the internet is usually unique around the world. Some people need help accessing the internet due to economic, social, and infrastructural practices. This creates ethical concerns related to inequality within the Christian communities. Those who have access to the internet are potentially excluded from the benefits of online Christian communities and resources. This creates a digital divide that hinders people's abilities to fully participate in faith communities, especially if the physical churches have switched to online services. The ethical reflection in this case is that Christian leaders are expected to engage in honest thoughts to determine the extent to which digital inclusion aligns with their theological and moral principles.[159]

Privacy and data security are critical ethical considerations when examining the use of the internet as a form of communication for Christian religious practices. Many

[158] Steven Jones, *Virtual Culture: Identity and Communication in Cyber Society* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing, 2002), https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446250303.

[159] Camille, "Digital Ministry and Leadership in Today's Church," 193-193.

online platforms collect user data, including information about religious beliefs, procedures, and interactions within religious communities. The implication is that the collection of personal data raises ethical concerns.[160] Users often need to know how much such information may be used against them. There is a need to respect online users' privacy and autonomy, especially regarding their religious faiths and beliefs. Protecting the privacy of individuals using online Christian platforms is essential; it requires clear and robust data protection and privacy policies. Online platforms, including religious groups, must implement and adhere to data protection protocols to safeguard users' personal information.[161] In the Christian faith, followers share their struggles and experiences with their spiritual leaders, such as through confessions. Only platforms that facilitate such interactions should help promote the privacy of such engagement. Inclusivity and tolerance are another important ethical issue to consider. Inclusivity reflects on broader dynamics of the modern world beyond just religion.

Online Christian communities attract a wide range of theological views and interpretations of the faith. The implication is that embracing diversity can be ethically challenging, especially for those who adhere to specific spiritual arrangements. This implication suggests that online Christian spaces must navigate the tension between respecting diversity and upholding their faith. Striking a balance between inclusivity and

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maintaining religious integrity is an ethical challenge in the Internet age. Online communities ought to define the boundaries within which theological diversity is

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[160] Philip Kenneson, "Gathering: Worship, Imagination, and Formation," In *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics* (London, UK: Blackwell, 2011): 53-69.

[161] Steven Jones, *Virtual Culture: Identity and Communication in Cyber Society* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing, 2002), https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446250303.

acceptable, respecting Christianity while still leaving room for thoughtful discussions and explorations of different ethical considerations, often extending to respecting and affirming the identities of all the people online and acknowledging that diversity is more than just the theological beliefs perspectives. The ethical issues of using the Internet as a form of communication for Christian religious practices represent a complex and evolving landscape that demands thoughtful engagement. The internet has the power to create even more access to spiritual resources and communities, bringing the message of Christianity to individuals who may be geographically or physically isolated. Transparency, education, and ethical reflection within the Christian community are essential in fostering respectful dialogue and empathetic engagement.

Conclusion

The interplay between communication and religion has evolved over the ages. In the Bible, Christian missionaries such as Saint Paul carried out missions by traveling long distances to Asia to spread the word of God. Every Christian's role is to carry out missiology as instructed by Jesus Christ during the Great Commission. The way missions and evangelism are carried over the years has changed. Today, tasks are carried out online by sharing religious texts and information through social media platforms. During the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the physical churches were no longer relevant, and people needed their church communities. The religious leaders would resort to online church communities, which has remained the same until now. Physical churches are still being used, although the turnout is not as great. The online communities have fostered even better communication where Christians can engage with each other online. Christians can interact with people of other faiths who challenge them to ask questions regarding their faith and biblical texts. Changing with the times is essential to maintain

the relevance of evangelism and aid to the command of the outstanding command of Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

Contemporary worship already presents many challenges, and resolving such challenges is essential in enabling theological accuracy and promoting cultural sensitivity. This chapter draws information from the biblical foundation chapter. The article tries to use the story of the centurion servant to define how the image of God can be felt anywhere and not just in the physical churches. The centurion has faith that Jesus Christ will heal his servant. Having faith and accepting that God is not confined to churches is essential in rebuilding Christian trust in this generation. While online churches are a significant step in evangelism, it is necessary to consider a blended version of missiology.

Allowing people to attend physical churches is still necessary since, as described within this chapter, it is essential to maintain Christian communities where Christians can feel like they belong somewhere and still participate in community engagement and development. Online Christian platforms have caused the multiplication of ministry where a single piece of sermon has the power to influence a massive group of people. Some people create praise and worship music out of a trending work of worship, aligning with the goal of discipleship and evangelism. This chapter also covers the ethical implications of sharing the word of God through the internet. It explores how the internet creates a gap and a lift where people without access to the internet are left behind while those with the internet can interact further and share religious insights. The implication is that the collection of personal data raises ethical concerns. Users often need to know how much such information may be used against them. There is a need to respect online users' privacy and autonomy, especially regarding their religious faiths and beliefs. Protecting the privacy of individuals using online Christian platforms is essential; it requires clear and robust data protection and privacy policies. The growth and development of the

internet can be seen as an advantage for the church, and it continuously proves that the church is constantly willing to speak the language of everyone's culture, ensuring that the biblical message is relevant to everyone.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

The advent of the internet has changed the way things run around the globe. Communication and connections have been redefined, and this goes to religion as well. Religious communities engage with each other and fulfill their spiritual missions online. Christianity, which for many years had been building on traditions of community gatherings, fellowship, and congregants' relationships, now faces both opportunities and challenges in adapting to this digital age. Online church communities have gained popularity, and most Christians worldwide are slowly integrating into online church services rather than attending physical church communities. Churches and other religious groups value their physical churches. They are seen as holy places where the presence of God is felt. Some certain rituals and ceremonies can only be carried out in these physical buildings. In the Bible, God asked Solomon to build the Temple, and it has been relocated by generations over and over again. People go for their prayers and commit their offerings and sacrifices to God. With the growth of the internet, however, the church community is left with questions regarding the effectiveness of online worship. The hybrid model of worship, where some members can attend church physically and others join online, provides a certain level of flexibility to participate in services in person or virtually. This model has grown and its major growth occurred during the COVID-19

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pandemic era. With the strict measures that were put in place such as social distancing and the withdrawal of social gatherings, it was difficult for Christians and other religious groups to fellowship together in person. Churches then took the initiative to adopt online platforms and social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok, to stream church services and to share Christian messages.

Throughout this Doctor of Ministry (DMin) program, I engaged in research that explores the changes in worship, community building, and missiology practices. This project analysis will discuss the information gained throughout my project, where I will integrate my findings from foundational research on the Bible, theology, and interdisciplinary studies, with particular attention being paid to the Great Commission's modern applications. I will discuss how digital tools can be used effectively to increase the church's outreach, promote discipleship, and create a church community. This final chapter is a culmination of all the prior research done and a forward-looking perspective on church missions in a digital age. I will discuss some of the responses I got from congregants and other participants and do an overview of how they affect the dissemination of religious information in the twenty-first century compared to past periods. The main objective, therefore, will be to evaluate how digital worship, whether online or hybrid, affects engagement, spiritual growth, and community formation within a Christian context.

The research will address three major questions how the internet has reshaped traditional worship structures, the theological consequences of these changes, and the ethical concerns raised by digital evangelism. For my prior research, I used Bible study sessions, interviews with members of the clergy, group participation, workshops, and questionnaires to collect data from participants about hybrid evangelism. I obtained

various experiences and perceptions across different worship formats. The findings indicate that digital worship has advantages like accessibility and convenience. I also risk diminishing some aspects of the spiritual community and discipleship. Digital formats of worship alone fail to recreate the communities of physical churches. A hybrid approach, however, seems to be the way forward, as it serves the needs of various age groups and creates convenience while not taking away from community engagement.

Background

The history of communication in mankind is important in understanding the communication that is upheld in churches. The internet started back in the 1960s. It was initially used in a way that the government researched and shared information. Computers then were large and immobile and to make use of information in one computer, one had to physically travel to the location of the computer. The Cold War also caused the development of the internet. The Soviet Union's launch of the Sputnik satellite led the U.S. Defense Department of Communication to develop different ways that information could still be disseminated after a nuclear attack occurred. In January 1983, the internet took cause for the first time, and new communications were established between different computers through a communications protocol called Transfer Control Protocol. This allowed different computers on different networks to communicate with each other, and all networks were eventually connected to a universal language.

The development of the internet led to other great inventions, especially social media platforms that allowed people from different parts of the world to communicate easily. The first true social media platform was launched in 1997, and other discoveries followed in 2000. Familiar platforms like LinkedIn, YouTube, and WordPress emerged in the early 2000s, and they targeted specific communities. Other platforms that emerged

and were more flexible include Twitter, now known as X, Weibo, Instagram, and WhatsApp. They allowed for better communication. The internet has indeed made the world a lot smaller. In a click of a button. Apart from the internet, other platforms have grown and developed, allowing the movement of goods throughout the globe easily. The internet has been a point of change for Christian communities and other religious groups.[162] Christians have access to online tools and applications such as Bibles, religious teachings, and recorded sermons that are accessible from anywhere, meaning that the capacity to grow the Christian community is huge. There are challenges, however, when it comes to managing Christians and religious information online. A challenge with social media and information on the internet is that it can easily be manipulated and therefore, it is upon Christians to take up the information with caution. During the COVID-19 global lockdown, online churches became important, and people would share inspiration online.

Churches found a way to share their sermons and teachings and encourage communities globally through social media platforms. About the technological themes we will be discussing, the internet is a form of modern missiology today. The internet allows churches to hold live sermons online where various people can join and actively participate in the sermons.[163] Social media platforms have given churches more options to consider when it comes to enhancing communications and spreading the word.[164]

[162] John R. Bryson, Lauren Andres, and Andrew Davies, "COVID-19, Virtual Church Services and a New Temporary Geography of Home," 111, no. 3 (2020): 360-372.

[163] Adogame and Olson, *Christianity in the Modern World: Changes and Controversies*, 8.

[164] Duane L. Anderson, "The Development of the Early Church," Integrity/deveachr.

According to the Book of Matthew 28:18-20 (NIV), “Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Jesus gives his disciples the authority and the responsibility to evangelize to the people all over the world.

On the same note, as followers of Jesus, Christians have the mandate to carry out the mission of Jesus Christ in evangelizing to people from all backgrounds. The world has become smaller and more interconnected through technology and means of communication. Discipleship has then become more accessible, especially for theologians. The relationship between the advancement of the internet and the theological theme under discussion, which is changing the approach of ecclesial mission through hybrid worship, especially during the post-pandemic era, as discussed in the Great Commission, is a great point of study when discussing theological foundations.

Methodology

This study utilized a mixed-methods approach that combined questionnaires, interviews, and survey data to collect data on the effectiveness of the hybrid mode of worship. In conducting this study, I approached members of the Restoration Bible Church International. For the first week, I carried out pre-surveys by creating a journal entry on what the Christians viewed as the right way to receive the word of God in the digital era,

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whether in person or online. For the next thirty-five minutes of the first day, I allowed participants to voluntarily share their entries, and I provided my feedback on my expectations to ensure that the answers were not biased. For the journal entries, in the

first session, too much time was wasted waiting for participants to join in. We accomplished very little with the time left, although the questions were excellent, and I believed that a larger group would have been more effective. For the second session, we discussed the relevance of missions in our church context. From what I understood, the urgency of outreach is utilization if the internet is an important step forward.

I tracked digital engagement metrics in my research by comparing how many people attended church services online versus those who attended in person. The quantitative data collected revealed significant changes in the behavior of entire congregations during services. A key observation of live streaming broadcasts assessed how participants connected with one another by analyzing their submitted comments and prayers, in addition to their involvement in virtual Bible studies. The research findings helped define actual digital discipleship scenarios. My research examined how digital worship influences members' dedication to maintaining their faith and how it impacts their level of active participation in religious activities. Analyzing this information was crucial in determining whether mixed worship platforms helped individuals uphold their faith commitments over time or attracted those who viewed religion as a commodity.

The second session was spent with the same group of ten people from the congregation, and we shared a lesson on hearing God in the Old Testament. The fourth and fifth sessions had similar discussions. We reviewed other churches' internet presence to see how they handle their social media platforms. Some churches did not have a social media plan at all. Some utilized varying postings that directed viers to click on links to discover which platforms they utilized. The churches that had effective online services had dedicated social media ministries that hosted information or ministers of the church, pastoral profiles, and messages to hear, and they broke down their mission focus to kids, adults, and working-age audiences.

The third session discussed the effects of the internet in our context. We realized there are areas of need in our social media usage. A focus on establishing a team that will lead and direct our social media presence on all programs. We discussed ways to drive more traffic through our live stream as we developed a great presence using a fuller breath of social media tools.

The church members, who are of different demographics in terms of age, ethnicity, and generation, shared the classical ways of evangelism such as prayer, and the Bible community outreach among others. This lesson was critical in figuring out how relevant these classical modes of worship and evangelism are in the present era. I journaled my prompts and took notes on the same. The third week was spent with a different group of people. I had a chance to interview theologians and church leaders. I prepared interview questions focusing mostly on the role that the internet played for the last few years, especially post-COVID, and the changes that the leaders observed in attendance and participation of the church members. I also conducted interviews and recorded different perspectives from different theologians on how they think the internet is shaping religion now and, in the future, (Appendix B).

For the fourth week, I studied relevant case studies on how churches can effectively use the Internet for missions. I analyzed the case study and extracted key strategies and best practices that I found fit for this church. The first case study was a twenty-minute identity case study of how churches effectively used the internet for missions. For Clinton Grace, their media presence consists of, a Pastor's Message to all viewers on their website, sermon messages to be accessed, live stream access, a social media page with content for kids' ministry, student ministry, and church ministry posting to Facebook and Instagram, a visit us page with directions to the church and service times, a connect page with Calendar Events and Ministries of the Church. The Alfred

Street Baptist has a watch live page that shows connections through Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube. They have a prayer page, where you can leave your request and view prayers on a prayer wall. In analyzing the case studies to extract key strategies and best practices, I concluded that it is important to answer viewer questions without having to ask. They want to know who you are and how you can meet them where they are.

The last week was dedicated to personal research and observations. Personal research on online evangelism and missiology was conducted. I was able to participate in various online church communities and observed their practices, noting the challenges these communities experienced. The effectiveness of online church communities compared to the in-person church experience was evaluated. There were differences, and each of these practices presented opportunities and challenges. I carried out extensive internet scoping and data collection, comparing different years in the past on the trends of online worship as compared to in-person worship. Attention to social media engagement in terms of religion on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok were noted. The website traffic was evaluated across different parts of the world, and the online worship attendance.

	Questions	Strategy	Source
Theologians and Church Leaders Interview-survey	8	Qualitative-Focused on leadership, evangelism, online worship, and the challenges presented by online worship.	Informed by literature and research.

Project Questionnaires	8	Quantitative – Focused on Restoration Bible Church International attendees' view on online worship and in-person worship and how each of the two is effective or not. Focused on how important it is to share the gospel on the internet and how effective it is to be an evangelist in the age of the internet.	In part informed by literature and research. In part informed by personal curiosity based on the trends and activities of Restoration Bible Church International.
Focused Group Discussion Questions	11	Qualitative – Focused on discussing the history of missiology, especially in the new testaments Great Commissioning. Discussed the advancement of the internet and how it has affected missions and evangelism. The challenges that the	In part informed by literature and research. In part informed by personal curiosity based on the trends and activities of Restoration Bible Church International
		internet poses as a tool for evangelism.	

Table 1. Interview, Survey, and Pre- and Post-Project Questionnaire Details.

In approaching this study on hybrid models of worship and their effectiveness, I selected a mixed-methods approach. I integrate surveys, journal entries, interviews, and case study analysis. This methodology was chosen to quantify the effectiveness of hybrid

worship models and allow an experience of the thoughts, traditions, and cultural practices of the congregation. I used qualitative and quantitative methods because this approach covers how hybrid worship influences individual spirituality, community engagement, and traditional Christian practices. One of the strengths of a mixed-methods approach in this context is its ability to go into the details of the worship experience from different demographics and perspectives. The Restoration Bible Church International was a great setting for this study, as its congregation has various demographics, including age, ethnicity, and generational background. Engaging with this group over several weeks allowed for an understanding of how different individuals interpret and adapt to hybrid worship models. I started with documenting journal entries of participants' initial views on worship in the digital era. I was able to capture honest, unfiltered reflections. This entry step was important as it helped to reveal the participants' theological beliefs, honest values, and assumptions about technology's role in worship.

The pre-surveys and journal entries were icebreakers and were designed to establish participants' perceptions and theological inclinations. I allowed individuals to voluntarily share these entries so that I could create an open environment that encouraged introspection. My feedback at this stage was minimal to prevent bias. I was aiming to guide participants toward self-reflection on what it means to worship in digital and physical spaces. This initial phase set the stage for a more engaged, thoughtful response to the structured lessons and discussions that followed in subsequent weeks. The second phase involved a shared lesson on hearing God in the Old Testament, which was conducted with the same group. This historical approach was a way to introduce the origin of the existing traditional forms of worship such as prayer, scripture, and communal outreach and now the newer, more technologically inclined methods related to online worship. We discussed classical forms of evangelism, and I observed the

participants reflect on how these traditional practices remain relevant or changed in today's context. I documented these conversations through my prompts and notes to understand how different people within the church view the changes through digital worship.

The third week was dedicated to spending time with theologians and church leaders. I engaged these individuals through structured interviews that allowed me to get the perspective of institution leaders on the role of the Internet in worship and community building. The fourth phase was dedicated to case studies that were critical in developing practical recommendations. I used real-world examples of churches, as discussed in the methodology, and how they use the Internet for mission work. I identified modes of worship that could be used within the Restoration Bible Church International. The case studies provided practical means, which was a more actionable part of my research study. The case studies were a way of moving my research from theory to a potential application. The last phase consisted of personal research and online observations.

Actively participating in various online church communities allowed me to document practices, challenges, and participant behavior across multiple platforms. Comparing online church attendance data, website traffic, and social media engagement over time helped me get a better perspective on the evolution of digital worship. Observing online platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok, I noticed trends in how churches engage with followers across digital channels and paid attention to the limitations and opportunities of the platforms. This mixed-methods approach was important for studying the hybrid worship model's effectiveness. It addressed the research questions I had in place and was engaging enough with my participants. I used many data sources, and I was able to create a better picture of hybrid worship that covered both the challenges and the opportunities that came with adopting a hybrid form of worship.

Implementation

Each person who was interviewed was recorded using an audio recorder. After the interviews were completed, the questionnaires were distributed, with the consent and assistance of a pastor, to the members of the congregation. I followed up to ensure that all questions were available and accessible to all participants at every stage of the process. All data was then collected confidentially. Neither the names of the congregants, theologians, and church leaders were personally identified in the information collected, recorded, or stored.

One component of the implementation involved assessing the number of live participants and those who remained active across various digital platforms. The analysis included examining the technical issues faced by members, particularly difficulties with connectivity and platform usability. This information served as a foundation for evaluating the feasibility of future hybrid worship and developing sustainable digital evangelism recommendations. Implementation strategies needed to address the reliability of user participation across different population groups. Active engagement differentiated some members from those who exhibited signs of technology fatigue during the service. The integration of technology in worship presented challenges in maintaining its effectiveness, as the use of advanced features might deter elderly individuals who are new to digital formats.

Data Source	Target	Collected	Notes
Theologian Interviews	2	All expected	All theologians and church leaders were present to be interviewed and

			gave important details.
Attendee Questionnaires	8	8	8 people filled out their questionnaires and gave proper feedback.
Discussion open questions	5	Open Discussion	Received an average of 5 responses per person. There are no responses that got zero feedback recorded.

Table 2: Data Source and Volume Collected

Interviews

A semi-structured interview guide was used when conducting the interviews (Appendix B). Open-ended questions were used, and that allowed the interviewees to openly express their thoughts and observations. The set of questions focused on the overall impact of the Internet in transforming traditional methods of evangelism and mission work. The questions addressed the way modern worship is related to biblical messages and the mandate of the Great Commission in the Gospel of Matthew. Some questions were asked about the theological concerns these leaders have when it comes to the rise of digital forms of worship and how participation in the church community has been affected.

Each of the questions that were asked during the interviews was intended to provide information on how the church leadership views and approaches digital evangelism. All questions were explored by each of the two theologians and leaders, and once the interview was completed, the "Otter" software program was used to transcribe

these interviews into text format for reference. The qualitative analysis provided helpful information in determining the frequency of the topic under study. For example, on six occasions, the word “digital evangelism” was mentioned as “the future of evangelism.”

Attendee Questionnaires

A questionnaire was developed for members of the Restoration Bible Church International. The questionnaires came in two parts pre- and post-project questionnaires. These questions built on what the interviews were discussing. The questionnaires, however, were from the point of view of the churchgoers, who are the majority of the data pool. Once the interviews were conducted, eight members provided the answers completely all of whom shared their genders and ethnicity. Forty percent of the answers were given by male congregants while the rest were female. Based on ethnicity, 51% were white, 28% were Hispanic or Latino, and the remaining percentage were Black or African American.

Discussion Questions

These discussion questions were carried out in a focused group of five people. Questions for this section were eleven, and every member was open to giving their opinion with no judgment. The conversation was incredible in that the members built on each other’s points. All members of the open discussion forum participated, and each gave a response for each of the eleven questions, some discussing it in length and others just discussing it shallowing, giving straightforward answers. None of the questions pointed to the discussion were left undiscussed. I took notes and journaled throughout the process and got important information on how church members feel about in-person worship, online worship, and a hybrid mode of worship.

Summary of Learning

The data collected through the pastor interviews, discussion forums, and questionnaires informed key discoveries related to each of the three research questions stated earlier. The findings gave a structured observation of the online church communities, physical churches, and hybrid means of evangelism and missiology. The findings also provide information on the opportunities and challenges of a hybrid form of worship. Analysis of the findings shows that the Internet changed the traditional methods of evangelism and missiology as understood in the context of the Great Commission. From the questionnaires, most of the people who participated said they used the Internet, mostly for social media purposes. A large number of the participants also stated they share the gospel via the Internet, and they find it somewhat important to do so frequently. With the development of short video formats on TikTok, reels on Instagram, and YouTube shorts, it is easy to share a piece of sermon or a Christian musical video that one might come across with fellow believers. When it came to worshiping in person compared to worshiping online, the number of people who did either was almost equal.

The implementation of hybrid worship models provides more than just convenience. These methods create a dual connection that happens immediately and continues in a sustained manner. The discussion feature available within online services enabled users to maintain post-service conversations that traditional physical assemblies could not match. Church members could choose from archived sermon recordings when they wanted to access teachings again at their convenience. Research data showed that online attendance led to decreased fellowship activity participation compared to traditional in-person participation.

Leadership proved to be a crucial element during the research phase concerning the effectiveness of hybrid worship delivery conditions. Digital ministry teams within churches enabled organizations to sustain member involvement and ensure technological accessibility for all. Leaders who participated in real-time discussions while addressing doctrinal questions cultivated stronger virtual communities among their members. The significance of strategic digital evangelism planning arises because virtual worship must become a permanent aspect of church mission activities.

The research revealed that personalized commitment plays a crucial role in hybrid worship models. While access to online worship and its flexible options are convenient, they cannot replace the physical connection that draws people to in-person gatherings. Participants noted that personal invitations for virtual Bible studies, along with individual digital mentoring, boosted their participation levels. Churches that implemented organized tracking processes, such as phone check-ins or tailored correspondences, saw improved membership retention rates. To succeed, streaming services require churches to cultivate personal digital connections with members who desire a connection beyond merely watching religious content online.

The approach that individuals from different generations accept toward hybrid worship serves as a primary driving force. Digital worship has gained popularity among younger members, while older attendees view it as an addition rather than a replacement for in-person attendance. Hybrid models need to incorporate features that cater to both younger and older individuals, as their worship preferences vary. Blended services offer a viable solution because they enable virtual and physical attendees to engage through integrated technological features that display live chats on church screens.

Online church services increased religiosity among people, but they also exposed followers to alternative theological beliefs that sometimes diverged from core teachings.

The growing need for churches to create online teaching insight programs arose because believers needed assistance in finding reliable Christian teachings through digital resources. Mandatory efforts to control theological variations must become essential for sustaining doctrinal unity in digital worship facilities.

Most people said they did not mind worshiping online, neither did they mind going to church. However, some pointed out that, when held up, or when something comes up, they found it convenient to fellowship in the comfort of their homes. Most of the young people who participated in the questionnaires and the open discussion forums pointed out they did not see the point of going to church if they could stream the church service from home. They mentioned that fellowshipping online allowed them to pause and reflect on the message and to record the sermon to listen to later when they were much more relaxed. From these findings, the Internet has fundamentally changed the traditional methods of evangelism and missiology by expanding the outreach of the Great Commission beyond physical boundaries. Traditionally, evangelism relied heavily on face-to-face interactions, mission journeys, and local community gatherings.[165] However, with the advent of the Internet, these methods changed and evolved into global, digitalized platforms. Online platforms such as social media, websites, and live streaming have enabled the church and missionaries to reach people and places that were previously inaccessible.

Audiences across the world are joining in worship services that are streamed far away from their physical proximity and provide real-time engagement and continuous discipleship through virtual communities. This digital shift allowed for the

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[165] Valerie E. Crumpton, "The Church Has Left the Building: A Leadership Perspective of Online Church Versus Traditional Church," Digital Commons George Fox University, https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/276/.

democratization of evangelism, where individuals and congregants can share the gospel without the constraints of travel time or financial resources.[166] Yet the digitization of evangelism also brings about the challenges of maintaining personal connections, the depth of theological engagement, and accountability. During the one-on-one interviews with the theologians and church leaders, almost each of them pointed out it is becoming difficult to create a rapport with the congregants for one day, they will be at church, and the other will opt to stream church online. The activities that were meant to develop theological understanding at the church level through community engagement are also slowly diminishing, and in efforts to keep up with the change, the theologians at Restoration Bible Church International are yet to come up with a method that instills community work and engagement at the church.

Findings from the study reveal that a hybrid form of worship has its advantages and disadvantages. For some people, it is a flexible way of connecting with God, and it allows them to access the services from the comfort of their homes. For others, there is a significant challenge regarding hybrid worship, as there are dangers associated with sharing theological information online. All the theologians pointed out that the Internet is a great place for the dissemination of information, and it is a breeding ground for hate and hostility. Some people, especially those of other faiths or non-believers, challenge the information that is shared online, and that leads Christians to question their faith and have a hard time connecting with God and his teachings.[167] Such people present a dilemma for

[166] Yvette Lau Ying, "The Blessed Assembly: Irreplaceable Physical Co-presence in Worship and Healthy Hybridity Reimagined after the Pandemic in the Digital Age" (diss., Sothern Methodist University, Dallas, 2024), 150.

[167] Duane L. Anderson, "The Development of the Early Church," https://pdf4pro.com/view/thedevelopment-of-the-early-church-aibi-24d1df.html.

theologians in that as Christians and believers, we are all called to share, and trust. Love and respect others as discussed in the gospel of 1 Peter 3:15 (NIV). The Internet also has all kinds of information. When trying to understand the Bible and its teachings, Christians might find themselves going through websites, podcasts, and discussions online that may have theologically inaccurate information.[168] Some people suffer from information overload that needs to be clarified by professional Christian leaders. This challenge arises from the huge collection and volumes of content available online, from theological books to misleading interpretations of Christian teachings and doctrines.

In as much as there are unavoidable challenges, there are also opportunities such as the fact that with a hybrid form of worship, it is easier to expand the outreach beyond the geographical boundaries of the church community. From the findings of the study, especially the open discussion forums, various social media platforms are mentioned when discussing hybrid worship. TikTok with its short video formats, allows people to share their interpretation of certain sermons and to share short format musical videos related to the sermons. With YouTube, most of the participants pointed out that the platform was great for live recording of platforms and the church a challenge of its own where members came to access all the sermons as live recordings. Facebook has groups where congregants can join and share the word of the day, offer encouragement where needed, and share sermons from time to time.[169] The religious leaders at Restoration

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[168] David R. Dunaetz, "Innovation in Churches: A Theoretical Framework," *Great Commission Research Journal* 13, no. 2 (2021).

[169] Danijel Casni, "The Need and Possibility for Evangelizing Through the Internet" *Kairos: Evangelical Journal of Theology* 13, no. 1 (2019): 93.

Bible Church International describe these platforms as “mobilization tools” where they can

reach large groups of people with messages at once without requiring them at one physical location.

Social media and digital platforms provide virtual evangelism and mission work, allowing believers to fulfill the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20). The digital tools allow for the creation of global Christian communities where people can engage in discussions, ask questions, and grow in their faith. Platforms such as Zoom and Google Meets facilitate virtual Bible studies and prayer meetings, breaking the barriers of distance and time zones.[170] As Paul used the tools of his day, which were letters and physical journeys to spread the Gospel as recorded in Romans 10:14-15, today’s digital platforms are the modern equivalents. Isaiah 55:11 reminds us that God’s word will not turn void and through these digital spaces, it can touch hearts in places where physical missionaries may not reach, including countries hostile to traditional forms of evangelism. To ensure effectiveness, it is important to adapt the message to cultural contexts and engage with followers authentically making discipleship an ongoing process instead of a one-time event.[171]

The study revealed how hybrid worship changed churches to become less interactive communities. Continuing traditional in-person religious services develop

[170] Justin Nortey and Michael Rotolo, "How the Pandemic Has Affected Attendance at U.S. Religious Services," Pew Research Center's Religion and Public Life Project, https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/12/14/how-the-pandemic-has-affected-attendance-at-u-sreligious-services/.

[171] Anita L. Cloete, "Living in a Digital Culture: The Need for Theological Reflection," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 71, no. 2 (2015).

community bonds because they engage people through personal encounters and communal eating and personal priestly support. Digital worship systems give widespread accessibility, which offers a welcome benefit, but it can also lead to a less engaged church community. Participants in digital worship services who do not interact during broadcasts encounter obstacles to spiritual growth, resulting in reduced participation in church-related events. Virtual pastors expressed concerns about maintaining personal connections with remote online participants, while emphasizing the importance of fostering religious interactions through online small groups and targeted outreach efforts.

The research study revealed how hybrid worship methods influence various demographic sectors at different rates. Congregations from wealthier backgrounds naturally adopted online tools, while poverty-stricken communities faced technological obstacles that hindered their digital engagement.[172] The combination of unreliable internet service, lack of smartphones, and difficulties with digital platforms made participation in virtual services challenging. Some churches initiated digital training programs alongside financial assistance to enable diverse worship participants to connect with online services. Modern churches need to balance the use of digital ministry tools with their commitment to maintaining the authenticity of traditional beliefs.

[172] Danijel Casni, "The Need and Possibility for Evangelizing Through the Internet," *Kairos: Evangelical Journal of Theology* 13, no. 1 (2019): 93.

Ethical Considerations and Implications

Using the Internet as a medium of worship means that Church communities need to ensure a high level of ethical standards. Reports suggest that the Internet can be a tool for good, but it has been used in the past as a tool to perform scams, brain washing

people, and peddle misinformation.[173] Understanding the ethical issues allows online Christian communities to address matters such as inclusivity and diversity in a space that is visited by every other person in the world. Decision-making in Christian religious practices in a digital era is important as it deals with the challenges that might arise and accepts the presented opportunities. Access and inclusivity are some of the ethical considerations that should be put in place.[174] The Internet can bring all the geographical and physical barriers down, and this means that people would have better access online. Church leaders should be aware of the misinformation that may be spread around the biblical interpretations of sermon messages and prayers. Educating the church communities on such danger would easily help the church communities thrive. Another concern is the Internet divide in some communities compared to others.[175] There are regions in the world that have limited Internet access, and hence, church communities

[173] Susan M. Camille, "Digital Ministry and Leadership in Today's Church," Proquest, https://www.proquest.com/openview/d4eb291efc8fcf2771f1ef3489fb5aa5/1?pqorigsite=gscholar&cbl=2030996.

[174] Philip Kenneson, "Gathering: Worship, Imagination, and Formation," *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics* (2011): 53-69.

[175] Steven J. M. Jones, *Virtual Culture: Identity and Communication in Cyber Society* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Ltd E-Books, 2002), 7.

that evangelize globally should be aware that the Internet still hinders the participation of certain faith communities.

Conclusion

The Great Commission as in Matthew 28:16-20 is a directive for all Christians to spread the word to all nations, embracing the recent times and adapting to the new era of

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modern worship aligns with the role of the Great Commission. Contemporary worship, as discussed, already presents a lot of challenges. Resolving such challenges is essential in enabling theological accuracy engagement and promoting cultural sensitivity while at it. Adapting to the times is important in maintaining the relevance of evangelism and fulfilling the Great Commission as commanded by Jesus Christ in the New Testament in Matthew 28:26-20. The Great Commission directs Christians to spread the gospel to all nations, and adapting to modern methods of worship is in line with this mission. Contemporary worship has a lot of challenges, but addressing the issues is important to maintain theological accuracy, cultural sensitivity, and meaningful engagement. The Internet gives an unprecedented opportunity to reach a global audience and enables theologians and church leaders to go beyond the local communities and engage people globally. This capability helps to fulfill the Great Commission by making disciples of all nations. The Internet also enhances accessibility and inclusivity, allowing individuals in remote areas with Internet access to attend virtual services and feel as if they are part of a community.

The Great Commission is about evangelism and discipleship, and like Jesus instructed his disciples to teach and baptize believers from all backgrounds. Christians are

expected to do the same with the available tools. Online platforms enable theologians to provide Bible studies and resources that lead to discipleship, making spiritual growth accessible to a wider audience. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of online worship to show the churches' willingness to engage with contemporary communication technologies. Unlike traditional churches, which require physical attendance, the online space allows for greater flexibility. People can reach the church, and the church can reach its audience from anywhere. Furthermore, the Internet has allowed for the multiplication of ministry, as sermons and worship services can influence a large number of people. Many create music or other forms of worship that are inspired by digital content.

The growth of the Internet is, therefore, an advantage for the church. Embracing the new tools of evangelism now and then is important for the church's mission to teach disciples and engage with people from diverse backgrounds, as expected of us in the Great Commission in the Gospel of Matthew. From this project, my hypothesis was a success, although it raised some questions. The study allowed me to explore some of the opportunities associated with a hybrid model of worship, such as flexibility and accessibility. On the other hand, some challenges cannot be ignored. Clergy leaders pointed out that it is becoming harder to organize church communities. This means that people are opting for solitary forms of worship. As in the Great Commission, we are instructed to fellowship together. Another challenge is all the ethical issues related to sharing information online. Religious information can easily be twisted, and hence, people who are not strong in faith might fall for misinformation from non-Christian communities. Moving forward, a gap that my research does not cover is how the church has prepared its members to move from physical churches to online churches and hybrid churches. Further research should be carried out on the ways to deal with the numerous

challenges of evangelizing online. This is a new topic of discussion, since online worship gained traction a couple of years ago, especially when COVID-19 hit, and people were forced to be on mandatory lockdown.

The clear advantages of digital evangelism require the church to balance its virtual ministry practices to avoid spiritual isolation from the community. The spiritual community needs to unite digital disciple-making practices with physical community support systems. Religious communities maintain their faith strength through an approach that integrates virtual engagement with face-to-face mentorship initiatives in local churches. Church leadership needs to develop strategies to strengthen the social connections produced by traditional worship services and convert virtual connections into actual physical relationships in the future.

Researchers need to explore how members of digital-only congregations may behave over the long term. Active participation in online religious activities can either help congregants strengthen their commitment to their faith communities or cause them to drift away from traditional worship. Valuable insights from these research questions will guide the development of future hybrid worship systems. Churches should prioritize finding solutions that enhance the authenticity of their online worship services. Worship through VR, along with interactive prayer rooms linked to AI-driven pastoral care systems, offers innovative ways for religious seekers to deepen their spiritual engagement in the digital age.

Digital evangelism is an essential method, yet churches must implement established theological principles and strategic community growth strategies to effectively use it. The organization’s primary goal must remain consistent: to produce disciples who will preach Christianity to every nation. Genuine religious devotion

requires faith expressed through traditional worship settings alongside novel spiritual practices, whether people worship from a device or sit in a conventional church.

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT – INTERVIEWS

Informed Consent - Interviews

I do not intend to use any flyers or recruitment documents other than an email and follow-up conversations with potential participants to ask them.

Dear Potential Participant

I would like to invite you to be part of a project that includes a series of meetings, discussions, journals, and questionnaires/surveys. This project is being conducted based on the context of Restoration Bible Church International's congregants as part of my research with United Theological Seminary, where I am a doctoral candidate. My research topic is "Iterating Forward a Hybrid Model of Worship Post-Pandemic," and I would like you to be a part. I would like you to commit to the six-week duration of the project (October 1 – November 6, 2024), which will include six weekly meetings. You will be helping me in my research and benefit by learning and growing with others. I look forward to working with you on this project. God bless you.

Grace & Peace,

Bishop Alfie Lewis

Accidental Data Disclosure

I plan to include the following language in the consent form. In the event of accidental data disclosure, there may be legal, financial, social, or personal implications. I, the researcher, will abide by the state's mandatory reporting laws.

APPENDIX B

INFORMATION GATHERED

Information Gathered

Surveys and questionnaires will be distributed electronically through secure platforms, such as Google Forms or SurveyMonkey. Interview transcripts will be securely recorded and stored electronically, with identifiable information encrypted to protect participants' privacy. Data will be securely stored on password-protected computers and backed up regularly to prevent loss or unauthorized access. Identifiable information will be used solely for research purposes and will not be shared with third parties. After the completion of the study, identifiable information will be securely deleted, and data will be anonymized for analysis and reporting. Confidentiality agreements will be in place with all participants involved in data collection or analysis to ensure compliance with data protection regulations.

APPENDIX C

PRE- AND POST-PROJECT QUESTIONNAIRES

Pre- and Post-Project Questionnaires

1. How often do you use the internet for social media purposes? (a) Very Often, (b) Somewhat Often, (c) Very Little, (d) Never. Why? (e) Very Little, (f) Never. Why? (g) We livestream every Service and Mid-week Service.
2. How often do you worship online? (a) Very Often, (b) Somewhat Often, (c) Very Little, (d) Never. Why? (e) We livestream every Service and Mid-week Service.
3. How often do you worship in person? (a) Very Often, (b) Somewhat Often, (c) Very Little, (d) Never. Why? (e) We meet weekly.

4. How important is sharing the gospel via the internet? (a) Very important, (b) Somewhat important, (c) Very Little, (d) Not at All Important. Why? (e) Every opportunity to share the GOSPEL is important. Making use of every technology
5. How effective has evangelism been in converting the sinner via the internet? (a) Very effective, (b) Somewhat effective, (c) Less effective, (d) Not at all. Why? (e) We are seed planters and don't always see the results.
6. With what age group is the church most engaged in the internet? (a) Children and youth, (b) young adults, (c) middle-aged adults, (d) older adults? Why? (e) We have an older congregation, and most of the non-members tend to be more mature saints.
7. With what age group is the church least engaged? (a) Children and youth, (b) young adults, (c) middle-aged adults, (d) older adults. Why? (e) We do not currently have a children's ministry.
8. How familiar are you with the church's online presence? (a) Very familiar, (b) somewhat familiar, (c) neutral, (d) somewhat unfamiliar, (e) very unfamiliar. Why? (f) I review all the Services to see comments and measure the effectiveness of the messages.

APPENDIX D

FOCUSED GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Focused Group Discussion Questions

1. What is the historical context of Christian missions, and how has it evolved?
2. How has the advancement of the internet affected the practice of missions and evangelism?
3. What are the theological underpinnings of evangelism in contemporary Christianity? The Gospel of Jesus Christ is foundational to reaching people groups. His death, burial, and resurrection.

4. What are critical challenges the internet poses as a tool for missiology and evangelism in Restoration Bible Church International? The sound quality needs improvement.
5. Has the role of evangelism evolved, and how has that changed the local landscape? Not in my opinion! Although, in today's social landscape people don't want to be reached or challenged with the Gospel.
6. How does Restoration Bible Church International approach missions and evangelism in the twenty-first century via the internet? RBCI is currently in a reset in its' evangelism strategy. Outreach is important, but manpower is limited.
7. How is internet use aligned with the Great Commission mentioned in Matthew's gospel Matthew 28:18-20? Through live streaming, the Gospel is introduced at the end of every message.
8. How can traditional methods of face-to-face evangelism be integrated with digital strategies for more effective mission work? Making use of a well-strategized Follow-up ministry.

9. What are the theological and practical implications of reaching a global audience digitally? It creates the opportunity for engagement with a worldwide audience. It brings the world closer together!
10. How do issues of cultural sensitivity and contextualization apply in the context of online missions? It allows other cultures to see the multi-faceted styles of Worship.
11. Are there any reservations about using the internet because of privacy or security concerns? I think those issues would be handled in the planning stages of designing your social media output.

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions

1. How do you perceive the role of the internet in transforming traditional methods of evangelism and mission work?
2. In what ways do you think hybrid worship models (both in-person and virtual) align with or challenge the principles of the Great Commission?
3. What theological or doctrinal challenges have arisen as a result of virtual worship and online evangelism?
4. How has the shift toward online worship and evangelism affected the sense of community within the church?
5. What role do you believe social media platforms play in reaching non-believers and spreading the gospel in today's digital age?
6. How do you think theological education and training need to adapt to prepare future leaders for digital and hybrid evangelism?
7. What strategies or approaches can be used to maintain theological depth and authenticity in online evangelism and worship?
8. From your perspective, what are the key ethical considerations churches must keep in mind when engaging in online missions and evangelism?

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